PATHWAY TOWARD A NATURAL THEOLOGY OF HOPE

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ABSTRACT

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Times of crisis can acutely raise questions about God's existence and presence and whether there are grounds for societal as well personal hope. In 2019, a leading theologian, Jürgen Moltmann, saw a world in peril, especially due to climate change, and offered a Christian-centered eschatological view of hope. In 2020, another major problem of worldly scope emerged, a viral pandemic, also raising questions about where God is.

The thesis of this paper is that certain ideas within theistic personalism, process thought, and humanism are helpful in thinking about God and the role of human beings in the creation, including in a time of crisis. There are certain key ideas they offer which in combination provide grounds for hope not dependent for acceptance upon one's beliefs about scripture or religious doctrines. For those who do not regard scripture as God's revelation, or who have no religion, these ideas may provide an alternative "natural" theological pathway to theism and hope.

Theistic personalist thinkers Bowne and Brightman addressed God's existence and goodness and an afterlife, and Brightman in particular engaged in a rethinking of God's power. Whitehead and subsequent process thinkers including Griffin developed the idea that God works with the creation in process, luring it to good choices. Brightman saw God's power as constrained, and process theologians see God's power as persuasive rather than controlling. This means that human beings can have a significant impact upon our own destiny. We face considerable challenges, particularly climate change. Humanist thinker Steven Pinker provides documentation of past human progress and conveys a hopeful attitude regarding the capacity of human beings to meet our challenges.

Use of some central ideas of these thinkers can serve as a pathway toward a natural theology of hope which, in its theistic conception, seems more credible and hopeful than atheism. A combination of the theistic and humanist ideas offers a less certain basis for hope than is often claimed for the scripture-based narratives of religions, but the result may be more credible, less authoritarian, and more hopeful in today's times.

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DEDICATION

This paper is dedicated to:

- John Long, Steve Harms, and Walt Smiley. John and Steve were my conversation partners on religious/theological issues through a written correspondence which lasted several years prior my coming to Drew. Walt first suggested that I should consider going to theological school in New Jersey.
- Greg Rest and Bob Waldrop. Both shared my enthusiasm for regularly attending the annual Lenten lunch speaker series at Saint Paul's Episcopal Church in Richmond Virginia and for discussing religious issues.
- Sandra Parisi, who provided additional inspiration for attending theological school and coming to Drew and was a source of encouragement in my studies.
- My children, Bryan and Lindsay. Theology is not their cup of tea, but in their own way may they find purpose, joy, and hope in their lives.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Many definitions have been given for the term "theology." For this paper, theology is viewed as "a program of inquiry into the existence and attributes of God" with consideration of God's relation to the creation and the creation's relation to God.[1] Theological inquiry is often thought of as taking place within the framework of a particular religion, especially Christianity. However, it does not have to take place within this constraint. Those who do not have any faith or are not adherents of any particular faith may certainly engage in study to make their own determinations as to whether they believe there is a God, what God may or may not be like, and the relationship between God and human beings and the creation. Further, theological answers from one's own religious tradition, one's church, or any single theological school may not fully fit with the conclusions to which one's own reason, experience, and conscience leads. Whether individuals are professional theologians or not, individuals should feel free to consider ideas from various religions and sources in combination with their own thoughts to develop a theology which seems credible.[2]

This is something I have tried to do. As part of this effort, I have found some of the ideas and arguments contained in two philosophical schools of thought, Theistic Personalism and Process Philosophy, to be helpful. There is some significant variability in the ideas which have been held by different scholars within theistic personalism and

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[1] The quoted portion of the definition is based on the theological half of a definition of natural theology which is given in *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, s.v., "Natural Theology," by James Brent, accessed 9/17/2020, https://www.iep.utm.edu.

[2] An argument for this perspective was previously made for Christian audiences by process theologian John B. Cobb, Jr. in *Becoming a Thinking Christian* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 11-26. The first chapter of the book is titled "On Becoming What You Are: A Theologian."

process thought, and I do not agree with either on every point. However, they present some valuable ideas about God and the creation which are not dependent upon scriptural revelation. Personalist and process thinkers discussed in this paper have engaged in a mode of thought or argumentation which, in being free of this dependence, can be called "natural theology."

A reasonable question to ask of any theological perspective is whether or not that theology provides grounds for hope, and if so, the nature of those grounds. Such a question becomes more pressing in times which seem to present daunting challenges for the future. In this paper, I seek to identify ideas which can provide a natural theological pathway toward hope. Some key sources of ideas for this pathway come from personalism, process thought, and humanism.

In this introductory chapter, I will provide general descriptions of natural theology, theistic personalism, process thought, and the meaning which is given here to "hope." (A discussion of the humanist ideas which can contribute to a hopeful theology can wait until Chapter Four). In addition, the chapter will close with a discussion of a ideas contained in a 2019 book by prominent theologian Jürgen Moltmann titled *The Spirt of Hope: Theology for a World in Peril*. Moltmann is known as the theologian of hope. He is not a natural theologian, but his work provides a good starting launch point for the paper.

NATURAL THEOLOGY

The approach which is taken in this paper can be classified as "natural theology." Natural theology is often contrasted with what has been called "revealed theology" which utilizes scripture as a revelation of God's being, will, and truth. What makes natural

theology unique as a theology is that it considers questions regarding God's existence, God's nature, and the creation, and it does so "without using any claims drawn from any sacred texts or divine revelation, even though one may hold such claims."[3] As explained in more detail:

> For purposes of studying natural theology, Jews, Christians, Muslims, and others will bracket and set aside for the moment their commitment to the sacred writings or traditions they believe to be God's word. Doing so enables them to proceed together to engage in the perennial questions about God using the sources of evidence that they share by virtue of their common humanity, for example, sensation, reason, science, and history. Agnostics and atheists, too, can engage in natural theology. For them, it is simply that they have no revelation-based views to bracket and set aside in the first place.[4]

One of the forums in which natural theology is often seen practiced today is in apologetics. Apologetics is the practice of supporting or defending one's religious belief. To reach non-believers, apologists (including many evangelical Christian apologists) realize that citing scripture or doctrines which have authority for them is likely unproductive in dialogue with those for which neither has any authority. To say that "God is or does x, because what I regard as the word of a God says so" does not constitute a good argument if listeners do not share the same presumption. In addressing such an audience, all, or at least a substantial portion, of the case which is made by more aware practitioners of apologetics is not based on scripture.

A criticism of natural theology which can be made is that there is no natural theological argument which has proved God's existence or provided any definitive knowledge about God. Both of those points can be granted, but natural theology can legitimately have a more modest aim. A realistic aim for natural theology is to show that belief in God is plausible and rational and it is arguably at least as credible, if not more

[3] Brent, "Natural Theology."
[4] Ibid.

credible, than thorough-going materialism. Opening skeptics up to the possibility of God's existence is regarded as a useful endeavor. Moreover, beyond the question of God's existence, it is possible to consider what we know from our own experience in developing more credible hypotheses about God and how God may be at work than may appear to emerge from scriptural interpretation.

Another criticism which can be made of natural theology is that too much attention is given to what one believes. Natural theology does tend to focus on what people believe or do not believe about God and the creation. It can be argued that it is more important to be in dialogue with people about what we can do for others or to better the world around us.

From a natural theological viewpoint, although actions are clearly important, beliefs matter also. Often in human behavior, although not always, actions do follow from belief. Belief can impact one's daily attitude and the extent of one's hope. Therefore natural theology, which involves thinking about what one believes, has a legitimate purpose. There is no intention, though, to discount the value of action. In fact, as will be described later in this paper, one of the conclusions that natural theology tends to lead to is the view that God's power is more limited than many may like to think, thereby heightening the importance of what conscious creatures do.

At least in terms of their development in America, theistic personalism and process thought have been shaped the most by thinkers who have self-identified as Christians. However, the general contours of these schools of thought are not dependent upon citing scripture or traditional church teachings. Thinkers of these schools have used reason, science, personal experience, and values in forming their beliefs, and on some

matters they depart from or adjust what might be regarded as traditional theological ideas or beliefs. The thesis of this paper is that naturalistic elements in these schools of thought (with some humanist ideas as well) can be used as a pathway toward a credible theology of hope.

PERSONALISM

Personalism as a philosophy is not inherently theistic. As the term "personalism" implies, the focus of the philosophy is upon persons and personality. While the concept of persons often is used to mean human beings, the concept is more broadly applied in personalism to include all selves who are self-conscious. Among personalists who are theists, the concept of "person" includes God, perceived as a self-conscious being.

The literature on personalism seems to hold that at the least, personalists view personhood and the relationships between persons as the primary reality and a philosophical anchor. For example, personalism has been described as follows:

> … the general affirmation of the centrality of the person for philosophical thought. Personalism posits ultimate reality and value in personhood…[5]

It is clear that personalism attaches great significance to persons and their relationships. This point will be addressed later as one of the aspects of personalism that could be important in a natural theology of hope.

However, a more rigid and extreme position has also been attributed to the philosophy. Rather than "just" making persons central in their thought, personalists have also been characterized as going to a more rigid and extreme position that "only" persons exist or are real. For example, Jan Bengtsson, in *The Worldview of Personalism,* quotes

[5] *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, s.v. "Personalism," by Thomas D. Williams and Jan Olof Bengtsson, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2020/entries/personalism.

Keith E. Yandell's definition of personalism, which in the first sentence describes it as the thesis that:

> only persons (self-conscious agents) and their states and characteristics exist, and that reality consists of a society of interacting persons.[6]

To say that only persons "exist" or are real seems questionable. If my purpose in the paper was to make a case for personalism and this maximalist position, I would see this as a roadblock.[7] However, as I am not seeking to make an argument for personalist philosophy per se, but to identify that which may be useful for a natural theology, I do not need to defend what seems a dogmatic view that "only" persons exist or any distinctive meanings which might be given to terms such as "exist" or "reality" to justify the position.

Although, as noted, personalism is not inherently theistic, Yandell's definition goes on to state that it typically is.

> Typically, a personalist will hold that finite persons depend for their existence and continuance on God, who is the Supreme Person, having intelligence and volition.

Yandell notes too that because it is typically held "that a good God will not allow what has intrinsic value to lose existence, they believe in personal survival of death."[8]

Personalism as it is defined contains several affirmations that could be elements of hope in a naturalistic theology. Human beings and life have intrinsic value, and there is a good God whose goodness is thought to provide assurance of a hopeful future. Chapter

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[6] Jan Olof Bengtsson, *The Worldview of Personalism: Origins and Early Development* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 31. Yandell's definition was given in *the Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy.*

[7] Most commonly it seems that what "exists" is viewed as something real, and the material world seems as real as the personal world in that sense. A person who is hiking and who is not conscious of a rock and stumbles over it has discovered the existence of the rock. The rock has substance and a location. It does require a conscious agent, a person, to reason to the conclusion that the rock exists, for example based on the stumble and subsequent verification through use of the senses. But it seems wrong to say that only the person hiking, and not the rock, "exists."

[8] Ibid.

Two of this paper will elaborate on one school of personalism which has been known as American Personalism or more specifically as Boston Personalism. To provide a manageable scope of discussion, for personalism the work of Borden Parker Bowne (1847-1910) and Edgar Brightman (1884-1953) will be the focal point. Bowne has been described as "the foremost American post-Kantian personal theist, defending the reality of personal selves and a personal God, and pushing back against absolute idealism."[9] Brightman has been called "the greatest of the personalist thinkers and an exemplar of personalist thought."[10] Key writings guiding the discussion in this paper include Bowne's *Studies in Theism* (1879), *Philosophy of Theism* (1887), and *Personalism* (1908), especially Chapter 6 of *Personalism* on "The Personal World," and Brightman's 1925 Ingersoll lecture on Immortality, *The Problem of God* (1930), *Is God a Person?* (1932), *A Philosophy of Religion* (1940), his chapter "Personality as Metaphysical Principle" in *Personalism in Theology* (1943), and *Nature and Values* (1945).

PROCESS THOUGHT

The term "process thought" is used in this paper to describe the school of thought which has come down and evolved over time as originated in thinking by Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947) and Charles Hartshorne (1897-2000). It is intended as a broad designation meant to encapsulate modes of "process" thinking which have also been termed "process philosophy," or, as it relates to God and theology, "process theism" or 'process theology." In this paper, the section on process thought focuses most on

[9] Gary Dorrien, *In a Post-Hegelian Spirit: Philosophical Theology as Idealistic Discontent* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2020), 209.

[10] Ibid., 266.

Whitehead, who is best described as a process philosopher, and on David Ray Griffin, who is best described as a process theologian.

"Process philosophy" has been described in broad outline by J.R. Justwit as a "longstanding philosophical tradition that emphasizes becoming and changing over static being."[11] The universe is in a process of becoming what it creatively chooses to be. The present moment is influenced by all prior moments but there is a creative aspect to each moment which allows it to not be deterministically set by the past. Justwit writes that "Most process philosophers speculate that God is also an actual entity."[12] It is thought that God is good and lures the creation to what is good, but God is not controlling. This means that self-conscious beings have an important role to play in how the universe "becomes." It also means that what happens is not just what God would will. The universe itself and human beings have a role in outcomes.

"Process theism" emphasizes the idea of God's involvement with the creation, but also the idea that God is affected by that process as well.[13] "Process theology" is interested in the theological implications of process philosophy. Professor of Religion Gary Dorrien has stated that "The only vital school of liberal theology in North America is the one founded on the organic philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead," and adds that process theology has had this standing for the past fifty years.[14]

As with personalism, there are attributes of process thought which may strike naturalistic theologians as hopeful. At least as held by its theistic thinkers, these attributes

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[11] *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, s.v. "Process Philosophy," by J.R. Hustwit, accessed 9/17/2020, https://www.iep.utm.edu.

[12] Ibid.

[13] *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, s.v. "Process Theism," by Donald Viney https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2020/entries/process-theism.

[14] Dorrien, *Post-Hegelian Spirit*, 267.

include that the creation and human beings have value, God exists, and although not a controlling being, God lures the creation toward what is good or has value. Further, some process thinkers hold that God preserves value which happens during the process within God's self, while others see the possibility of human life after death.

As will be discussed further in Chapter Three, when process theologians refer to God, what they mean differs in several ways from how many religious persons conceive of God. For skeptics of scripture and orthodox teachings and doctrines, the conceptions of God which process theologians reject are less likely to be troubling than for scripture-based doctrinal believers. In fact, many skeptics may agree with what process theologians reject, and find in this rejection a peeling away of some obstacles to theistic belief.

To keep within the scope of the paper and discuss process ideas which are useful for a naturalistic theology of hope, the paper will address some of the ideas contained in the writings in the originator of process thought, Alfred Whitehead. His writings which are most used in the discussion include *Religion in the Making* (1926), *Process and Reality* (1929), *Adventures of Ideas* (1933), and an Ingersoll lecture on Immortality (1942).

In addition, idea advanced by process theologian David Ray Griffin will be addressed. Griffin's inclination toward natural theology is clear in a chapter he wrote for a handbook on natural theology published by Oxford University. The chapter was entitled "Process Thought and Natural Theology." In the chapter, Griffin states that natural theology was "central" to the work of both Whitehead and Hartshorne, and he summarizes his own "process natural theology."[15] Among major process theologians, he

[15] David Ray Griffin, "Process Thought and Natural Theology," in *The Oxford Handbook of Natural Theology*, ed. Ruseell RE Manning (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 276-277.

has also written the most on the subject of life after death, which is included within the concept of hope taken up in this paper. Griffin works which are most discussed in the paper include a book he co-authored with John Cobb, Jr., *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition* (1976), *God Exists But Gawd Does Not: From Evil to New Atheism to Fine-Tuning* (2016), and *The Christian Gospel for Americans: A Systematic Theology* (2019).

HOPE

In a broad sense, hope is a feeling or belief that good or better days can be ahead. Many people seek reasons or a basis for hope especially in times of trouble, which the year 2020 seems to be. In the United States, for example, the year has been characterized by: a global pandemic with the U.S. as an epicenter; distressing incidents of police violence against black members of society; protests for police and justice reform and law and order concerns; wildfires of tremendous scale, serving as a tragic and worrying reminder of climate change; and a presidential election involving an authoritarian incumbent who alleged that his apparent defeat was due to the election being rigged.

It seems important to address what more specifically is meant by hope in this paper and the relationship between this hope and theology. By “hope,” I mean a reasonable but uncertain belief that in some significant way, life on this planet matters and one’s own existence and/or the existence of others will be good or possibly even better than it is today in a future time. The relationship seen between hope and theology is based on the thought that what we hope for may not be achievable by good fortune or by human endeavor alone. The hope envisioned may require some degree of divine influence or power.

To explain this intended meaning further, I define hope above as a "reasonable although uncertain belief" to distinguish it from two other extreme alternatives. The first of these is an optimistic feeling which we can demonstrate or anticipate has zero or virtually no chance of happening. Such a feeling is ungrounded wishful thinking. It would be a hopeless-to-achieve hope. The second of these alternatives is certainty. If we are certain that this desired future state or condition will occur, then we are claiming to have more than hope. We are claiming actual knowledge of this desired future outcome.

The hope which is envisioned in this paper is of three forms: planetary, societal, and personal. Planetary hope is seen as hope for the continuance and sustenance of life in a relatively hospitable planet in spite of challenges such as climate change. Societal hope is a hope for progress and advancement in the quality of life that is enjoyed by all peoples around the globe. Quality of life is seen as resting in spiritual as well as material well-being. The personal hope which will be addressed is a hope for life after death opportunities which can provide for the fuller development and the greater realization of the value and potential within persons and their relationships than is provided in a single, often short and troubled existence on this earthly plane.

To provide grounds for planetary, societal, and personal hope, the perspective taken in this paper is that there are several matters which a theology of hope should address. These include:

1. The Concept of God – Basic assumptions made about who or what God is, or is not, should be communicated.

2. God's Existence – The theology should provide a plausible and reasonable basis for belief that a supreme being exists.

3. God's Goodness and Power as Grounds for Hope – The theology should provide a plausible and reasonable reconciliation of God's goodness with the existence of evil. The theology should provide a plausible theory of

how God does act and exert power in the world, and grounds for hope in that.

4. Human Capabilities as Grounds for Hope -- If the theology regards God as having or exercising less than all-controlling power (such that humanity has its fate at least partly in its own hands), the theology should indicate what capabilities or power human beings have and grounds for investing some of our hope in what we can do.

5. The Value of Life and Persons – The theology should affirm the value of life and human worthiness to have hopeful desires, possibly including life after death.

These points, established without use of scripture, can be building blocks for one's natural theology of hope.

JÜRGEN MOLTMANN'S THEOLOGY OF HOPE

The best known theologian of hope in the second half of the twentieth century through to today is Jürgen Moltmann. Having first written a book on hope in 1967 titled *Theology of Hope*, Moltmann's most recent book, released in 2019, is titled *The Spirit of Hope: Theology for a World in Peril*.

Moltmann is not a natural theologian (he is a confessional Christian who utilizes scripture frequently), and he is not a personalist or a process thinker. His thinking merits attention here due to his prominence in theological thinking about hope and the recency and relevancy of his latest book.

In this recent work, Moltmann lists four ways in which he says Christian theology speaks today. He identifies with the fourth way, which is an eschatologically-oriented theology. In this theology, God "reveals the world in becoming, in history, and in its yet unrealized possibilities." Of note, the first two of the four ways are personalism and process theology ("God in relationship" and "God in the process of becoming"). The

third way is "God in history," which Moltmann sees as having been encouraged by Hegel.[16]

Moltmann wrote in 2019 for the purpose of "reasserting hope today" in the face of a number of perils.[17] Writing just prior to the global pandemic, the perils which he identified included a lack of love of life, nuclear weapons, social conditions of misery, and ecological conditions threatening world destruction. Of the problems facing us, he gives greatest attention to climate change.

Moltmann advocates what he calls an ecological spirituality in which he seems to call for a greater presence in the moment, which reminds one of Eastern thought. He writes that "We see and hear almost everything, but we smell, taste, and feel less and less."[18] He explains this conception as follows:

> In order to resist cynicism and indifference in the face of the modern destruction of the life of the earth, we need to elaborate a new ecological spirituality. Those who begin to love life, the life that we share, and the life of the earth, because they love God, will resist the killing of human beings and the destruction of the earth. This new spirituality regards the earth as a sacrament, because it conceals in itself the mystery of the presence of God. This makes universally true what is proclaimed in the Lord's supper or eucharist: "Taste and see that the Lord is good.' Holy communion addresses the remote sense of seeing and the close-up sense of tasting, and thereby addresses the human being as a whole. Ecological spirituality invites us to live with all our senses in God's creation, which is filled with God's Spirit.[19]

Moltmann writes that "Christian hope draws the promised future of God into the present day, and prepares the present day for this future."[20] The trend of human acitivity which Moltmann sees as characterizing the present time, and which he projects into the

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[16] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Hope: Theology for a World in Peril* (Louisville: Westminster Knox Press, 2019), 161, 219. The text identifying the four ways is found on page 161. Moltmann provides footnotes on page 219 which identify the thought traditions behind the ways.

[17] Ibid., vii.

[18] Ibid., 120.

[19] Ibid., 120-121.

[20] Ibid., viii.

future, is increasing urbanization. Regarding this trend, Moltmann seems concerned and worried but hopeful. He writes that this is a "dangerous project, and elaborates that if project fails, "only a few people will survive to become the wiser for it," citing the potential for the destruction of cities in war or through climate catastrophe. It is unclear, he says, whether the future will "bring progress that leads to a better life," or "the destruction of all human life." Still Moltmann says "We need the audacity of hope to decide for life." Christianity can anticipate "the success of the big-city experiment, as long as the churches disseminate the hope of God for humankind and see our future and the future of the earth in the coming of the City of God 'on earth as it is in heaven.'"[21]

He writes that "Every Christian hope begins with the rising of the crucified Christ and sees the end of this world in the light of the beginning of God's new world."[22] Moltmann sees that a "disintegration of the Christian world" will take place, with a new peaceable church arising.[23] It would be good to hear more from him as to what he envisions in using the word "disintegration."

In a chapter titled "Persevering in Faith: Roots of a Theology of Hope," Moltmann looks at the theological positions of John Calvin and Martin Luther with a favorable tone. In a later chapter, Moltmann writes that in Christian thinking, the cross and Jesus' resurrection need to be seen together. "In the cross, the forgiveness of sins is effected in the resurrection the new birth to a living hope."[24] It is the resurrection which brings about "a transformation of the reconciled," a "liberation from the burdens and sins

[21] Ibid., 92.
[22] Ibid., 138.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid., 170.

of the past."[25] The resurrection leads to an "anticipation of the general resurrection in this One, and the beginning of the overcoming of death in and through the One."[26]

One of the aspects which Moltmann's theology of hope has in common with personalism and process theology is that hope, at least in a pre-eschatological phase, depends at least partly on human action.[27] His book reads in part as a call for human change in attitudes and action. His call to an "ecological spirituality" of mindful living, embracing life and the senses, and respecting the earth, has appeal on a personal level.

Moltmann takes God's existence as a given in the book, and his backstop for hope is the resurrection of Jesus effecting a liberation of the reconciled from sin. He has an eschatologically-oriented view, but how that relates to his climate change concerns and our planetary future is not clear. Moltmann believes in an "apocalypse." However, he sees it not as "the end of the world," but rather as "the uncovering of that which is hidden, that is to say, of the truth" where "we will know oursevles as we have always been known by God."[28] Apocalypse is also "the raising of the dead" which will be "the human part of the great transfomation of the transient world into the world that cannot pass away." Apocalypse also "means the restoration of all things."[29]

Moltmann's work provides an example of the tone and substance of a theology of hope which aims to generally fit within a particular religious tradition and is explained using assumptions from that tradition. In this paper, we will return to Moltmann's view of

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[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid., 165. Here Moltmann speaks of the world-preserving God as "less like a heavenly emperor than like Atlas, bearing the globe on his strong and patient shoulders." In this image, even God's creative novelty and persuasive power are not recognized.

[28] Ibid., 204.

[29] Ibid., 205. Moltmann provides a helpful explanation of his eschatological perspective in a 2005 article published in the *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* entitled "The Blessing of Hope: The Theology of Hope and the Full Gospel of Life." In the article, Moltmann states his view that Christians "should get away from dispensationalist eschatology." Instead, he advocates what he calls an "Advent eschatology,"

science and technology in the concluding chapter. In Chapters Two through Four, however, we turn to ideas which fit more in tone and substance with a natural theological approach. Specifically, theistic personalist, process, and humanist thinkers will be addressed. The purpose will be to identify and consider ideas within these streams of thought which may provide a basis or pathway toward a natural theology of hope.

CHAPTER TWO

THEISTIC PERSONALISM OF BORDEN BOWNE AND EDGAR BRIGHTMAN

The focus of discussion of theistic personalism in this chapter will be upon two figures, Borden Parker Bowne and Edgar Sheffield Brightman. Bowne is regarded as the originator of an American school of personalism known as "Boston Personalism." Brightman was one of Bowne's students and he became a leading personalist thinker as well. (Among Brightman's students and admirers was Martin Luther King, who also ascribed to personalism). Matters addressed by these thinkers which are potentially germane for a natural theology of hope include the value of personhood, a credible conception of God, arguments for God's existence, responses to the problem of evil, and thoughts regarding life after death..

BOWNE'S THEISTIC PERSONALISM

To help understand Bowne's philosophical work and the issues he focused upon, it helps to understand who he was and the context in which he was writing. Bowne was a clergyman and theologian, and a philosopher and intellectual, who respected science. Consequently he was very interested in a philosophical sense in thinking about theism and the nature of reality. He was a prolific writer of 17 books and 200 articles.[30] His books that I will be citing in this chapter were published 20 to 49 years after Darwin's theory of evolution became known with the publication of *On the Origin of Species* in 1859. Darwin's theory rocked the religious world.

From his point of view as a philosopher and a theologian, Bowne believed that the religious world had overreacted to evolution. He shared a concern that the theory was

[30] Dorrien, *Post-Hegelian Spirit*, 207.

being interpreted as devaluing human beings. But overall he saw it as calling for additional thought about one's conception of God and how the world works, rather than a serious challenge to theistic belief.

Writing in 1908, Bowne spoke of how for the "generation just passed," "the new wine of science and evolution went to the head and produced many woes and more babblings."[31] As a consequence of that new wine, "All who had any grudge against religion loudly proclaimed its baselessness, and many who were interested in religion were profoundly disturbed by the new order."[32] He attributed the extent of the disturbance to a lack of philosophical preparedness.

> For a time the religious world was in a condition of stampede and panic, but after a while it became clear that the difficulty lay not in the facts themselves but in the philosophy by which they were explained… The new facts were interpreted on the basis of a crude sense-realism, and this view has always had a tendency to materialism and atheism… The storm we had was part of the price we paid for being philosophically unprepared.[33]

Bowne's philosophical approach was grounded by three postulates. First, "the coexistence of persons" is assumed. Bowne wrote that "It is a personal and social world in which we live, and with which all speculation must begin."[34] Second, a law of reason is held to be binding upon us. Third, there is a "world of common experience."[35] In this, Bowne was not dismissing the reality of differences in experience as well. However, he thought that as beings in this world, we have "a certain form and type of experience with certain familiar conditions," and this is not insignificant.[36]

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[31] Borden Parker Bowne, *Personalism* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1908), 10.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid., 11-12.
[34] Ibid., 20.
[35] Ibid., 21.
[36] Ibid., 156. He notes the possibility that there "may be widely systems of reality for beings who are differently constituted…"

To say that Bowne's personalist philosophy was theistic, it may also be useful to note how Bowne viewed theism and the alternative philosophical views which he had in mind and argued against. Bowne identified as philosophical views of particular interest to him materialism, which "conceives that the world of experience can be explained by molecules and atoms"; agnosticism, which holds that "we can know nothing beyond phenomena" and the "causal power" behind the world of experience "is forever hidden,"; and theism, which "holds that the order of things can be explained only by an intelligent cause back of all appearance and manifestation."[37]

Bowne regarded theism as more credible and hopeful than materialism, while agnosticism was on the sidelines of the debate. Asked to provide an essay on "Bowne and Personalism" (published in 1943), Bishop Francis McConnell wrote that one good way to understand Bowne's personalism is to "regard it over against some forms of impersonalism with which he fought all his life."[38] Bowne was deeply critical of Herbert Spencer's philosophy in which "matter and force and their laws were primary and determinative, with little place for spiritual and the personal."[39] Human consciousness was being ascribed by materialists to just "sensations" without any real essence of their own. Picking up upon counterarguments against materialism which were made by thinkers such as George Berkeley (1685-1753) and Thomas Hill (T.H.) Green (1836-1882), Bowne noted that the sensations to which materialists appealed are in flux and fleeting, they perish. If such sensations are to be noticed, something needs to exist which registers the sensations and abides through the change. That something is the self, the

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[37] Bowne, *Personalism*, 4-5.

[38] Francis J. McConnell, "Bowne and Personalism," in *Personalism in Theology: A Symposium in Honor of Albert Cornelius Knudson*, ed. Edgar Sheffield Brightman (Boston: Boston University Press, 1943), 22.

[39] Ibid.

person. Knowing the existence of one's self enables one to know other selves. In this, personalism is also about relationships.

A good source for understanding Bowne's thoughts on God are his 1879 work *Studies in Theism*, his 1887 work *Philosophy of Theism* , and his 1908 work *Personalism*. In these works, Bowne (1) makes a case that the "world-ground" is intelligent and personal; (2) addresses possible attributes of the divine, including some of the strongest claims which are made, such as omnipresence, omniscience, and omnipotence; and (3) seeks to understand God's relations with the cosmos and the problem of evil.

Bowne notes that one of the problems which theists face is that "It is commonly assumed that the theist aims to demonstrate the existence of God. Of course a strict demonstration is impossible, and then theism is held to be overthrown."[40]

Rather Bowne sees theism as confronting real problems. He writes that "The question of all speculation is not whether there is reality, but what it is, and what its nature may be."[41] Theists pose solutions which are not without difficulties but which need to be weighed against atheistic or materialist answers that are unresponsive or have difficulties as well.

A World-Ground That Is Intelligent and Personal

Bowne's approach is to consider how the cosmos seems to work and engage in philosophical speculation as to what that means for the ground which underlies it. He makes a case in the book for the reality of intelligence and personhood as key grounds revealing a God of intelligence and personhood.

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[40] Borden Parker Bowne, *Studies in Theism* (New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1879), 3.
[41] Ibid., 7.

Bowne writes that the intelligence of the world-ground is "the central question of theism."[42] At a big picture level, Bowne considers what the "causal explanation" is for the intelligence of human beings. He considers two principles: Is it materialist in origin, that is, "necessary or mechanical agency, which is driven from behind"? Or is it "self-directing intelligent agency" which exists before human mind?[43] On behalf of the latter proposition, Bowne points to "order" and math in the physical system, design, and the trustworthiness of reason. A few comments on each is useful.

Order in the Physical System. Bowne notes that human study of the cosmos has been predicated on the notion that there is an underlying reality to it that might be intelligently deciphered. As Bowne frames it, "all study of objective reality assumes the fact of law and system" and a "rational cosmos is the implicit assumption of objective cognition."[44] That assumption has shown reward in the success of science in finding patterns and laws which are intelligible to us. Bowne writes that "The heavens are crystallized mathematics" and "all the laws of force are numerical."[45] Are we to think that it is "self-directing reason" behind this, or some sort of "blind necessity"? On the latter, Bowne says that "then we have to assume a power which produces the intelligible and rational, without being itself intelligent and rational."[46] The only answer to that which Bowne sees is that somehow "it must," but that answer means that "the problem is abandoned altogether."[47] Bowne sees theism as a plausible explanation.

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[42] Borden Parker Bowne, *Philosophy of Theism* (New York, Harper & Brothers, 1887),
[43] Ibid., 68.
[44] Ibid., 64.
[45] Ibid., 66.
[46] Ibid., 68-69.
[47] Ibid., 69.

Design in the Organic World. Although writing in 1887, Bowne was aware of potential pitfalls in the way in which the design argument can be framed and implications from evolutionary theory. He writes that the argument "has been over and under-estimated."[48] He makes it clear that his argument is not: "Design proves a designer. Here is a design. Hence these things have a designer."[49] He also writes that:

> Nature is, to a certain extent, usable, and much has been made of this fact in the design-argument… but the argument forgets that nature is often obstinate and intractable… Moreover, in great departments of natural activity we see no purpose at all.[50]

Rather he writes that in truth, "the design argument derives its force from the consciousness of our own free effort."[51] As we have consciousness:

> The problem then arises how to deduce the conscious from the unconscious, the intelligent from the non-intelligent, the purposive from the non-purposive, and freedom from necessity. [52]

We see intelligent actions in human beings yielding purposeful results. If we do see intelligibility in cosmic action, Bowne argues that it is an "act of caprice" to say that it "does not point to intelligence." The existence of mind in nature and in man "stand or fall together."[53]

Theory of Knowledge. There seems to be some redundancy in Bowne's third point with the first two, because Bowne goes back to the point that the alternative to theism is to think that the world-ground is founded in non-intelligence (which he does not consider credible). Lacking a grounding in intelligence, the intelligence we are aware of and use to acquire knowledge is not expected. There is no ground for reason and

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[48] Ibid., 83.
[49] Ibid., 84.
[50] Bowne, *Studies*, 158-159.
[51] Bowne, *Philosophy*, 109.
[52] Ibid., 99.
[53] Ibid., 111.

knowledge. Atheism, he says, engages in "appealing to reason in support of principles which destroy reason."[54]

God and Personhood. As a personalist Bowne also sees God as a "person." It is important to understand that by this, Bowne does not mean "corporeality," that is, envisioning God as having a body or having "form of any sort."[55] This Bowne explicitly rejects. Rather the key aspect of personality or personhood which Bowne intends in seeing God as personal is "self-knowledge and self-control."[56] These abilities distinguish the personal from the impersonal. Bowne thinks it incredulous that these abilities would be "denied to the ground and source of all power and knowledge."[57]

Additional Attributes of the Divine

Bowne finds the world-ground and God to be intelligent and personal, but he recognizes that this only begins to approach the conception of God which is held in religion. He moves from there to addressing several more issues, including the claims of unity and eternity, and the claims that God is unchangeable, omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent. In this section the focus will be on the latter four attributes. In his discussion, Bowne recognizes these attributes but discusses a narrowing of their sweep which may be needed and which could add credibility to our conception of God compared to how the attributes are often viewed.

God's Essential Nature Does Not Change, But God's Activity and Knowledge Can Change. Bowne expresses a concern that traditional assertions of God's

[54] Ibid., 120.
[55] Ibid., 128.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid.

unchangeability can cause us to "lose the living personal God altogether."[58] For Bowne, God is unchanging in the particular sense of a "constancy and continuity of the divine nature which exists through all the divine acts as their law and source." There is a core which does not change. However, Bowne objects to seeing God as having a "rigid sameness of existence." He argues that this "would contain no explanation of the advancing cosmic movement, and would admit of no change in action and knowledge."[59]

Omnipresence Means That Space is Not an Obstacle for God. Bowne holds that there is only one sense in which it is tenable to hold to a doctrine of omnipresence. Rather than maintain that omnipresence means being present in all spaces, the sense in which Bowne sees omnipresence as viable is in denying that "space is a limitation or barrier for God."[60] He explains that if God wills to act in any way, God's activity can be "immediately and completely present." Also in the converse, "if the finite wishes to act upon God, say by prayer, neither the prayer nor the person need go wandering about to reach and find God; for we live and have our being in him; and he is an ever-present power in us."[61]

Omniscience Involves Knowledge of All Possibilities But Excludes the Essentially Unknowable. Bowne notes that in its broadest sense, omniscience means a knowledge of all things, including the past, present and future. However, Bowne raises the question of whether some things are indeed unknowable, even to God. He notes that an apparent chief difficulty with omniscience is the idea that we make free will choices.

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[58] Ibid., 146.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid., 149.
[61] Ibid.

Bowne writes that "a free act, until performed, is only a possibility, and not a fact… the act can be foreknown only as possible, and never as actual."[62]

In his conception of free will acts, Bowne goes further than process theology does in terms of arguing their free nature. He says that "By definition a free act is an absolute beginning, and as such is not represented by anything before its occurrence."[63] Process thinkers would generally concur that individuals make free choices but these choices are not wholly independent of all the circumstances which lead up to the moment of choice.

Despite making a case for seeing an irreconcilable contradiction between God's foreknowledge and our free will, Bowne uses mystery to avoid taking that position. He provides that God may have ways of knowing which are beyond our comprehension.

Omnipotence Means That What Is Doable Can Be Done. As omniscience includes the ability to know what can be known but not the unknowable, so omnipotence means the ability to do all that which can be done. It does not mean that God is all-powerful in the sense of having all (total) power, nor does it mean that God can do everything which is conceivable. For Bowne, providing creatures with a free will and an ability to act upon that will means giving creatures the power to independently exert their own influence or power. The power which human beings have is very significant in Bowne's eyes. He says:

> Unless, then, appearances are unusually deceitful in this case, it is plain that man is no impotent annex to a self-sufficient mechanical system, but is rather a very significant factor in cosmic ongoings, at least in terrestrial regions. He is an inhabitant of the invisible world, and projects his thought and life on the great space and time screen which we call nature."[64]

God does not then have all of the power at work in this plane of reality. Further, while it

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[62] Ibid., 158.
[63] Ibid., 158-159.
[64] Bowne, *Personalism*, 277.

is conceivable for God to have the power to fully control human beings, it is logically contradictory to think that God can both grant to human beings free will and the ability to take actions, yet also fully control them.

For theists who wish to think that God is omnipotent in the sense of controlling all that is, and consequently deny that human beings truly have free will, Bowne points out the severe problem which the existence of evil then presents. He writes:

> There is no vindication of God possible on any deterministic theory. Such a view makes him the real sinner in all sinning; and the apparent sinners are but the cunning automata through which the omnipotent sinner works.[65]

God's Relations with the Cosmos, Existence of Evil, and the Possibility of an Afterlife

Unlike deists, Bowne sees God as in relationship with the world. One of the striking aspects of Bowne's thoughts on this is the resemblance some of it has with the process theology discussed later. Bowne describes the world with which God interacts as a process which is "a developing, changing one."[66] The following is a key paragraph with this resemblance:

> But God… is also the founder and conductor of the world-process. This fact brings God into a new relation to time. This process is a developing, changing one, and hence is essentially in time. Hence the divine activity therein is essentially temporal… As knowing all the phases and possibilities of the process, the divine knowledge of the system may be viewed as without succession, and hence as non-temporal. But as the chief agent in the process, and as ever adjusting his activity to the advancing process, both his activity and knowledge must be changing, and hence temporal."[67]

In this writing, Bowne uses some characterizations of God's role in the world-process which may be more controlling than process theology holds. While "founder" is a

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[65] Bowne, *Studies*, 372. In following up on that point, Bowne makes what is sometimes referred to as the moral law argument in apologetics, stating that "moral evil cannot exist if there be no moral order. In its very notion it is a departure from moral order; and hence necessarily implies it in the system… sin appears as a rebellion against the moral law which has been legislated into the very nature of things."

[66] Bowne, *Philosophy*, 153.

[67] Ibid., 153-154.

concept which seems compatible with process theology, "conductor" and "chief agent" imply more control than process theology generally holds. On the other hand, Bowne suggests limits in God's control over the process as well, as was indicated earlier. In the preceding quote, while God is described as the "chief agent" in the process, this implies that there are other agents who are not the chief. Reiterating that the process has a degree of freedom and unpredictability, note that Bowne sees God as "ever adjusting" God's own activity in response to the process.

Bowne struggled with the issue of evil. He looked for some justification for natural evil in possibly positive consequences which it might have, such as opportunities for moral development. With regard to moral evil, as noted previously Bowne saw free will as something of an explanation. But still he wondered why "the innocent suffer and perish as well as the guilty," and he asked "Why was sin permitted to have such terrific consequences?"[68] He did not claim to know the solution to the problem; in fact, he acknowledged that in his mind, the "problem of evil admits at present of no complete speculative solution."[69]

However, Bowne believed in the soul and he did look toward the possibility of an afterlife. He acknowledged that many people associate what is real with "the objects of sense-perception," what is "tangible or visible." A dependence of mind upon body is widely seen:

> … the materialistic argument seems very strong to crude common sense. Mind and body begin together, advance together, decay together, and, so far as observation goes, they perish together.[70]

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[68] Bowne, *Studies*, 374.
[69] Ibid., 355.
[70] Ibid., 375.

However, he saw that what he called the "essential phenomenon" of matter and mind are different. For matter, it is motion; for the mind, it is "thought, feelings, and volition."[71] Our unity as a person, our consciousness, our memory and reasoning, and our ability to act are all facts from our experience. To the question "What is this 'I' which thinks?," Bowne writes from a spiritualist perspective that it is "the unitary, substantial soul, which abides across the years, and gathers up its past and present experiences in the unity of its own existence."[72]

Bowne said that philosophy could say "little" about what the future is for souls. But he disagreed with any materialist certainty that death of the body ends the personality/soul. "For our belief in a future life," he wrote, "we are thrown back upon our trust in the divine love and righteousness."[73]

In life after death, he foresaw God as a judge, but one with regard for saints and sinners. He wrote:

> the Judge of all the earth shall do the best, for saint and sinner alike, which the eternal laws of righteousness will permit. To one who has this faith, life presents indeed a dark problem; but to one who has it not, blindness is the only refuge from despair… We do not agree with the pessimist, but our chief reason is, our faith in a future life… He chooses the gospel of despair; we choose the gospel of hope. The future must decide between us.[74]

Bowne thus invested hope in God and faith in an afterlife.

BRIGHTMAN'S THEISTIC PERSONALSIM

As noted earlier, Edgar Brightman is highly regarded as a personalist thinker. From Brightman's personalist perspective, "personality or selfhood is a first principle." It

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[71] Ibid., 381.
[72] Ibid., 387.
[73] Ibid., 404.
[74] Ibid., 374.

is the key to understanding reality, but it is does not discount the existence of the non-personal. (He wrote that "No personalist thinks that reality depends on human minds, or that chairs or tables will vanish into nothingness if we human beings cease to perceive them." However, personalists hold that "the world of nature is the conscious experience and will of a cosmic mind."[75]) He identified, though, some of the alternatives to personalism which personalists reject: skepticism, dogmatism, and subpersonal or super-personal principles.

> Personalists reject skepticism, which denies that any key to reality can be found; they reject dogmatism, which declines to appeal to experience and reason but trusts some supposed authority; they reject subpersonal principles like matter, energy, or neutral entities, as being unable to account for the facts and the activity of consciousness, and equally reject super-personal principles as being vague, mystical, and undefinable. Only in personality are the demands of empirical adequacy and rational consistency fully satisfied.[76]

Brightman defines "a person" as a "conscious or spiritual unity." Person is not mean to be synonymous with human being. In his personalism, Brightman assumes an "inner life of animals" which has such a unity.[77] Further, as noted by Bowne, God is seen as a person. Writing in 1932, Brightman saw some movement away from a personal idea of God, and regarded it as "not a movement towards greater truth, but simply a movement towards obscurity and pseudo-simplicity."[78] Brightman writes that "Any impersonal view of God is either vague or unsuited to serve as the object of prayer and worship…"[79]

God's purposes are regarded as most important. Personalists share a belief that:

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[75] Brightman, *Is God a Person?* (New York: Association Press, 1932), 21.
[76] Brightman, "Personalism," in the previously cited collection of essays *Personalism in Theology*, 42.
[77] Ibid., 56.
[78] Brightman, *God a Person?*, 3-4.
[79] Ibid., 62.

> The processes of the universe are all forms of conscious purpose; that evolution is the striving of God himself; and that every material thing, as well as every person, has some place in that purpose."[80]

Brightman was a student of Bowne's, and he became a highly regarded philosopher in his own right during the 1920s, the decade following years in which the nation had been in the grips of a world war and a worldwide flu pandemic. The "Roaring Twenties," as the decade came to be known, was enjoyed by those most advantaged by the economy, but poverty was widespread. The decade was also a time when many religious people continued to see a contradiction between evolution and their religious belief. The famous "Scopes Trial" involving evolution took place in Tennessee in 1925. While the courtroom argumentation was seen by many as devastating for Christian fundamentalism, the result was that the teacher accused of teaching it was found guilty and fined (and the law under which the case was prosecuted remained as part of Tennessee law until 1967). Christian fundamentalism was in conflict with evolution as well as with other Christians who did not concur with the articles of faith which were being identified as fundamental.

Meanwhile, some strong critics of religion were emerging. Bertrand Russell, for example, delivered an attention-getting lecture in 1927 titled "Why I Am Not a Christian." As opposed to addressing the various "fundamentals" of the faith which some Christians had published, Russell took the approach of not even bothering with those and went right to attacking two propositions which he regarded as basic ideas all Christians would hold:

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[80] Brightman, *God a Person?*, 15.

(1) belief in God and immorality and (2) belief that "Christ was, if not divine, at least the best and wisest of men."[81] He attacked both beliefs with confidence and some wit.[82]

Thus, although Borden Bowne may have thought that he was providing philosophical tools to maintain a form of theism which (1) held no quarrel with evolution, and (2) had equal or greater plausibility than materialism/atheism, substantial tensions between different views remained. It was within this environment, in the latter part of the 1920s and the early 1930s, that Brightman (and as we will later discuss, Whitehead) did some of his best work. In this section of the paper, the greatest focus is upon Brightman's 1930 book *The Problem of God* (1930). In the book, Brightman engages in the task of natural theology, articulating a conception of God and what God is and is not, and then using a non-scriptural basis to argue for God's existence.

The Context for Brightman's Rethinking About God

In *The Problem of God*, Brightman recognizes that the World War presented a serious challenge to belief in God's existence and presence. He perceives that there has been a change in the extent of theistic belief among the major English-speaking philosophers from "pre-War" to "post-War" times. Of the seven philosophers he lists from a period before the War, he says the "great majority" were theists; but among seven post-War thinkers he lists, only one or two "could possibly be regarded as theists," with most "open opponents of theism."[83]

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[81] Bertrand Russell, "Why I Am Not a Christian," in *Why I Am Not a Christian and Other Essays on Religion and Related Subjects*, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1957), 4.

[82] With regard to the design argument, Russell quoted Voltaire's sarcastic remark to the effect that "obviously the nose was designed to be such as to fit spectacles."

[83] Edgar Brightman, *The Problem of God* (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1930), 29.

But while theism itself and belief in God's immanence had seen a decline, Brightman also indicates that the major alternative, materialism, had not been faring well either. He writes that advances on a number of scientific fronts appeared to be undermining ideas of physics upon which materialism had rested. Of interest here, Brightman quotes Whitehead as saying "The old foundations of scientific thought are becoming unintelligible," and quotes Whitehead as adding the rhetorical question: "What is the sense of talking about the mechanical explanation when you do not know what you mean by mechanics?"[84]

Brightman's purpose for the book was to present a concept of God which responded to contemporary realities while still offering grounds for religious faith. He wrote in the preface that the book "has grown out of the conviction that the idea of God is in need of revision."[85] He cited the enlargement in knowledge and experience which had taken place since Christian theism began. He expressed his concern thusly:

> The eternity of God has been confused with the eternity of a special idea about God. In the past few decades, however, there have arisen many doubts and new opinions about God. It is only natural that this should occur. Indeed, it is obvious that no idea ought to be believed if it can neither withstand criticism nor learn from its critics. Yet men greatly dislike to contemplate the possibility of change in their fundamental religious belief. It is, however, almost self-evident that the advance of knowledge must mean a change in our thought of God.[86]

Brightman reported that he began his new reflections about God with a theism "substantially identical" to Borden Bowne's.[87] However, his reading and reflection led him to revisions in that view. The major change which Brightman envisioned was a different understanding of God's power. The conclusion he reached is that God, in his

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[84] Ibid., 31.
[85] Ibid., 9.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid., 10.

view, is limited in power, not only because of empowering creatures with free will, but also due to an internal constraint which God strives to overcome. After articulating his concept of God and the limits of God's power, Brightman employs natural theological arguments for God's existence.

Brightman's Conception of God as a Person, Supremely Conscious, Valuable, and Creative

Brightman writes that "many have supposed that there has been revealed in Scripture a complete and adequate idea of God" but he calls that a mistaken view.[88] He in essence is declaring that he does not feel bound by scripture. While he does not use the term in the book, the book reads like an exercise in natural theology. He seeks to identify "a satisfactory working idea of God" responsive to contemporary realities.[89] Having a "working idea" of God seems to be a good basic aim for theological thought, and it is appropriate to have this conceptual idea before attempting an argument for God's existence or addressing questions regarding human suffering and God's power.

Brightman's working idea begins by stating that "God is a Person supremely conscious, supremely valuable, and supremely creative…"[90] Each of these concepts merits some discussion because this is Brightman's affirmation of who God is.

We have already seen that personalist Borden Bowne thought of God as a person, with person defined as a being with self-knowledge and self-control. Brightman shares that view, but is sensitive to the point that some readers would be troubled by regarding God as a "person," for two reasons: the term is often equated with being human and/or it is thought of as implying a physical body. Neither is the case in personalism. God is not

[88] Ibid., 108.
[89] Ibid., 110.
[90] Ibid., 113.

seen as material. The key point, too, is that in personhood, God is a conscious being. It arguably makes no sense to think otherwise. Brightman writes:

> …if we mean, as some do mean, to deny that God is a conscious spirit, then we are moving off into the dark. To deny that God is conscious is to assign to him a state of unconsciousness; it is to deny that he can love or know or will or purpose, for all of these are conscious processes. If there is a God at all, a being worthy of our worship, he must be conscious.[91]

What most makes God supremely valuable, in Brightman's explanation, is God's goodness, which he calls God's "most essential attribute." Brightman notes how critics of religious belief point to the existence of evil as a reason for disbelief, and religion recognizes it as a problem also. However, the "problem" which critics often ignore is the problem of "good" in the world. While critics ask where evil comes from, theists may ask where good comes from. Atheists assume "that the whole range of value experience arises in man from a source that neither knows nor cares anything about value."[92]

By supremely creative, Brightman means that God is the "source of the vast cosmic energies" and is "eternally creating."[93] Brightman argues that it is by God's will that consciousness exists in the world aside from God's own. However, by doing so, God limits his control over the universe.

Brightman's Hypothesis of "The Given" as a Limiting Factor in God's Power

Brightman's definition of God, which starts as just discussed, closes with the statement that God is "yet limited both by the free choices of other persons and by restrictions within his own nature."[94] Thus, Brightman sees two limits in God's power in his definition. The first, "the free choices of other persons," is an issue previously

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[91] Ibid., 119-120.
[92] Ibid., 121-122.
[93] Ibid., 123.
[94] Ibid., 113.

discussed regarding Bowne's theism. The idea is that in giving persons the free will to make choices, persons are given the ability to act according to that will. Through their ability to act, they have power to effect change commensurate with that ability. God therefore does not have all power and does not control persons exercising their power.

Although the free will aspect of Brightman's definition may not be embraced in some quarters, this aspect is less novel and controversial than the statement that God is limited by restrictions "within his own nature." Brightman presents evidence of four types in support of his theory: (1) the facts of evolution, (2) the nature of consciousness, (3) the principle of dialectic, and (4) religious experience. He anticipates that there may be objections to God being restricted in some way, but he explains that he is trying to understand our experience. The problem Brightman chooses to face is the theodicy problem, that is, how to account for the evil in the world and the existence of a God supreme in goodness and power.

Brightman hypothesizes an explanatory factor he calls "The Given." This is a major idea of Brightman's. As he explains it:

> … there is in God's very nature something which makes the effort and pain of life necessary. There is within him… a passive element which… constitutes a problem for him. This element we call The Given. The evils of life and the delays in the attainment of value, in so far as they come from God and not from human freedom, are thus due to his nature, yet not wholly to his deliberate choice…[95]

With this statement, Brightman is offering an alternative explanation for the co-existence of a good God and evil. It is not that God allows evil for higher purposes or for purposes which we do not understand. And it is not just because God allows free will

[95] Ibid., 113.

persons to make free (and evil) decisions. Instead Brightman hypothesizes that there is a factor within God which prevents God from having full control.

For those who would like to see hope for better days and an increasing triumph of good over evil, it could seem like Brightman developed a plausible solution to one problem at considerable expense, because initially this appears to be a discouraging speculation. However, there is a more hopeful side to Brightman's perspective. He hypothesizes that with regard to the Given, God will "make an increasingly better conquest of it throughout eternity without wholly eliminating it."[96] He makes a claim that the Given will "in no way imperil the divine ideals and purposes; it would cause tactical difficulties, not difficulties in major strategy. God will always know every possible contingency and nothing could catch him unprepared." [97] Brightman writes in sum:

> On our view, God is perfect in will, but not in achievement; perfect in power to derive good from all situations, but not in power to determine in detail what all situations will be. It is not a question of the kind of God we should like to have. It is a question of the kind of God required by the facts.[98]

Charles Hartshorne, a leading process philosopher who extensively corresponded with Brightman over a few decades, believed that Brightman's thoughts in this area represented a substantial contribution. He wrote after Brightman's death that "the clear and the bold insistence… that even the divine reality must be finite in a definite sense, was a landmark in the history of religious thought."[99]

Brightman's Natural Theology Arguments for God's Existence

[96] Ibid., 183.
[97] Ibid., 186.
[98] Ibid., 137-138.
[99] Randall E. Auxier and Mark Y.A. Davies, eds., *Hartshorne and Brightman on God, Process, and Persons: The Correspondence* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2001), 87.

After explaining his concept of God, Brightman provides six arguments for God's existence. Brightman did not label this endeavor as a natural theology activity, but the arguments presented did not utilize scripture or any religious teachings. The arguments which Brightman includes are: (1) the rationality of the universe, (2) the emergency of novelties in the universe, (3) the nature of personality, (4) the evidence of values, (5) the evidence of religious experience, and (6) systematic coherence.

Brightman acknowledges that there is some overlap in the underlying logic of some of these points. The major theme behind his arguments is that positing an intelligent being in whom values reside makes more sense of the world than a materialist approach. We see rationality in the operation of physical laws, and we see that various novelties have emerged in the world such as life and consciousness. We hold values regarding what is good and evil, and we are aware that many human beings have had "unique experiences unlike those of everyday life," including experiences in which they report having been "conscious of the presence of God, of his power and help, of his approval or condemnation, and in some sense, of his guidance."[100] In these various ways, belief in the existence of God (as conceived in the book) has a systematic coherence which materialism lacks.

Brightman's Thoughts on Immortality

In 1925, Edgar Brightman was invited to give the Ingersoll Lecture on Immortality. This series of annual lectures was established at Harvard University in the 1890s, with lectures to be given by clergy or by lay persons on the subject of "the Immortality of Man." Many highly regarded thinkers have given this lecture (including, as will be discussed later, Alfred North Whitehead).

[100] Brightman, *Problem,* 160.

Brightman titled his lecture "Immortality in Post-Kantian Idealism." This topic fit with Brightman's work because personalism is one form of such idealism. In his lecture, Brightman clearly sets forth the immortality "problem" as he sees it. He states it "has to do solely with the survival of individual personal consciousness. Other conceptions are either not problematic or not concerned with immortality." For example, Brightman notes that an individual may live such a life, or may have offspring, which keep one alive in a memory or hereditary sense. But such opinions, he says, are "trite platitudes" which "constitute no problem" and "offer no immortality."

Further, he has "no reasonable doubt" to think "that traces of what we once were will forever be a part of the cosmos" or that "some residue of Adonais and of us all will doubtless forever be in the One." However, the "sting" of the matter comes in asking "What of the soul of Adonais himself? Does the individual person truly live or truly die?"[101]

Brightman sets forth the proposition that whether one has faith in life after death or not is "a function of one's total cosmic perception."[102] A major factor in that perception is the value which we attach to human life. In Brightman's thought, there is an "intimate bond" between what import we attach to what is valued, including human value, and destiny, including human destinty. Brightman writes: "Is value real and permanent in the universe, or is it a passing phase of cosmic evoluation? What is the value of conscious selves?"[103]

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[101] Edgar Brightman, *Immortality in Post-Kantian Idealism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1925), 2-4.

[102] Ibid., 5.

[103] Ibid., 26.

Brightman addresses those questions in a section of the lecture titled "The Idealistic Metaphysic of Personality." Whereas some may assert that all are gathered up into "the One" or the "Absolute," Brightman says that "idealism is an assertion of the significance of the finite self."[104] He states that "idealism is based on a recognition of the meaning and value of individual personality."[105]

Brightman includes in the discussion three points for immortality made by philosopher Johann Fichte: (1) there are limitless possibilities for the development of the self, (2) the moral law, which "commands endless activity for good," such that "the present state of humanity can therefore not be its final vocation," and (3) belief in a "sinking into God" which nonetheless maintains individuality. He quotes Fichte as saying that "no really developed individual, can ever perish."[106]

In concluding the lecture, Brightman states that "there is substantial ground for reasonable hope of immortal life" if (1) "value is to be found in experience" and (2) "if personality is a spiritual whole that finds value through its own membership in the universal order which includes but transcends all human persons."[107]

Brightman stated his belief in immortality again in a personal letter to Charles Harshorne in 1943.[108] Three years earlier, he addressed the topic in a work on the philosophy of religion. For Brightman, the crucial argument for immortality is the goodness of God. He notes the unrealized potential of lives which death cuts short:

> Our potentialities are to a great extent unrealized when death comes. Browning's poem Cleon, infers faith in immortality from the unrealized purposes of the poet's

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[104] Ibid., 37.
[105] Ibid., 38.
[106] Ibid., 42-45.
[107] Ibid., 60.
[108] Auxier and Davies, *Hartshorne and Brightman* , 74.

> soul... The belief in immortality is the belief that purpose is a better clue to man's real nature and destiny than is death.[109]

Brightman writes that "If there is a God – supreme, creative, cosmic person – then there is an infinitely good being committed to the eternal conservation of values."[110] In that commitment, "God, the conserver of values, must be God, the conserver of persons."[111] If all perish with bodily death, "God and man alike could look back on centuries of effort with no permanent results, no persons treated as ends in themselves, no life coming to full development."[112] It is in God's goodness that hope for life after death is found.

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In sum, theistic personalists Bowne and Brightman sought to make a case for God's existence as well as hold a credible conception of God. Both grappled with the question of God's omnipotence given the evils which exist in the world. Brightman proposed that in addition to God's granting and allowance of free will to operate, God may be constrained by a certain internal factor he called "The Given." Both Bowne and Brightman saw hope in a possibility of life after death for persons in light of God's goodness.

In the next chapter, attention will turn to the process thought of philosopher Alfred North Whitehead and the subsequent development of his thinking into a school of theology known as process theology. Issues which can have a bearing upon hope, such as God's existence, nature, and powers, and the possibility of life after death, will be addressed from a process perspective.

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[109] Edgar Brightman, *A Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc.,1940), 389.
[110] Ibid., 401.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Ibid.

CHAPTER THREE

PROCESS THOUGHT OF WHITEHEAD AND GRIFFIN

Process thought is multi-faceted and there have been many compelling thinkers who have worked within this tradition during the past one hundred years. I will not repeat here the broad introduction given to process thought in the Introduction, nor do I purport to provide a comprehensive treatment of the theology. I will note the major (and obvious) difference in focus between it and the personalism just discussed, however. Whereas personalism puts its focus on "persons" (the value of persons, looking at the world and understanding the world from the standpoint of being a person, and personal relationships), process thought puts its focus on the stream through time of "actual occasions" or "events" (the value of occasions/events and the way in which occasions/events unfold in process, with prior occasions/events having an influence but not being determinative of new occasions/events).[113]

As background, I will initially provide a broad overview of the speculative philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead. (As noted previously, Whitehead was a contemporary of personalist philosopher Edgar Brightman, with both becoming prominent for their philosophical thought after World War I). Whitehead's work in speculative philosophy can be seen as the specific means by which he produced ideas useful for natural theology. It is from the use of Whitehead's speculative philosophy as a base that process theology has developed. Whitehead's thoughts on God's power of persuasion rather than coercion and his thoughts on life after death are also addressed.

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[113] Whitehead distinguishes between "actual occasions" and "events." Whitehead saw the "actual world" as being "built up with actual occasions." He uses the word "event" in "a more general sense of a nexus of actual occasions" whereas "an actual occasion" is "an event with only one member." See Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: Corrected Edition*, eds. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (New York: The Free Press, 1978), 73.

In the chapter I will also address several topics which have been of interest to one of the major process theologians, David Ray Griffin (born 1939). His thoughts regarding some of these topics can be useful, I think, for constructing and supporting a theology of hope. These topics include:

- What God is not, as well as what God may be,
- The fine-tuning argument for God's existence versus the multi-verse explanation,
- Additional arguments for God's existence, and
- "Salvation" and the possibility of an afterlife.

WHITEHEAD'S SPECULATIVE PHILOSOPHY

Whitehead begins the seminal *Process and Reality* with a first part entitled "The Speculative Scheme" and a first chapter entitled "Speculative Philosophy." In so doing he identifies the philosophical approach which he is taking.

Use of the word "speculative" may connote to some that the thinking which is involved is not rigorous. It suggests a mode of thinking or analysis which involves conjecture in an absence of hard evidence or proof. There are issues in philosophy for which rational conjecture about the truth or the use of one's imagination is the best which one can do, and this is certainly the case with regard to some theological issues. However, some practitioners of speculative philosophy or theology may achieve greater rigor than others. Philosophical or theological positions are more rigorous if they exhibit characteristics of internal coherency and substantial consistency and if they fit well with (or do not contradict) facts we are most sure of, whether from direct experience or relatively certain knowledge.

Whitehead sets a high bar in the definition of Speculative Philosophy which he provides. He writes that it is "the endeavor to frame a coherent, logical, necessary system of general ideas in terms of which every element of our experience can be interpreted."[114] The use of the word "every" in the sentence conveys a strong ambition. Coherence is critical; Whitehead says that it is "the great preservative of rationalistic sanity."[115] He states that in philosophy, "our datum is the actual world, including ourselves…"[116] However, he also recognizes an important role for imagination. He refers to Francis Bacon's method of induction as an approach used in science, but says that "What Bacon omitted was the play of a free imagination, controlled by the requirements of coherence and logic."[117] He also posits that success in the use of imagination can be assessed by the extent to which it has applicability, including possibly illuminating fields other than the one under study.

Whitehead sees philosophy as a discipline which can bring togther scientific findings and thought and religion. In fact, he writes that philosophy "attains its chief importance by fusing the two, namely religion and science, into one rational scheme of thought."[118] He states that religion "is centered upon the harmony of rational thought with the sensitive reaction to the percepta data from which experience originates," whereas science is also concerned with harmony, but it is a harmony of "rational thought with the percepta themselves."[119]

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[114] Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 3.
[115] Ibid, 6.
[116] Ibid., 4.
[117] Ibid., 5.
[118] Ibid., 15.
[119] Ibid., 16.

In his major work, *Process and Reality*, Chapter X is specifically titled "Process." Whitehead begins that chapter with the statement: "That 'all things flow' is the first vague generalization which the unsystematized, barely analysed, intution of men has produced."[120] He concludes the paragraph with the statement that "the flux of things is one ultimate generalization around which we must weave our philosophical system." Whitehead contrasts as a rival to this thought those philosophical outlooks which focus on the permanance of things. In the category of what is permanent, one might think of "the solid earth, the mountains, the stones, the Egyptian Pyramids, the spirit of man, God."[121] Whitehead's focus, though, is upon the flow of occurences/events. This includes the felt impacts of "actual entities" such as human beings and God.

Process theologian David Ray Griffin has stated that "Natural theology was central" to the work of Whitehead (and also to process philosopher Charles Hartshorne). An illustration he gives is that Whitehead's major work, *Process and Reality*, was actually his expansion upon lectures he had given as part of the Gifford Lecture series. This prominent lecture series was established in the 1880s for the purpose of advancing Natural Theology.[122]

WHAT GOD IS NOT, AND WHAT GOD MAY BE

"The purpose of God," Whitehead wrote, "is the attainment of value in the temporal world."[123] However, following Plato, Whitehead saw God pursuing that purpose through persuasion rather than the use of coercive power.

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[120] Ibid., 208.
[121] Ibid.
[122] David Ray Griffin, "Process Thought," 276.
[123] Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* (New York: Fordham University Press), 100.

Whitehead took issue with a tendency in religion to give glory to God based on God's power. He wrote that:

> this worship of glory arising from power is not only dangerous: it arises from a barbaric conception of God… This view of the universe, in the guise of an Eastern empire ruled by a glorious tyrant, may have served its purpose. In its historical setting, it marks a religious ascent… The glorification of power has broken more hearts than it has healed.[124]

Whitehead saw a limitation in God and God's power of command. "The limitation of God is his goodness." Whitehead elaborated that God:

> gains his depth of actuality by his harmony of valuation. It is not true that God is in all respects infinite. If He were, He would be evil as well as good. Also this unlimited fusion of evil with good would mean mere nothingness. He is something decided and is thereby limited.[125]

According to Whitehead, "The power by which God sustains the world is the power of himself as the ideal." With this ideal, God confronts the world but does not control it. Whitehead stated that God "confronts what is actual in it [the world] with what is possible for it." [126]

The value of persuasion as a means to an ends, both for human beings and for God, was prominently addressed by Whitehead in his work *Adventures of Ideas*. Whitehead devoted a chapter in the book to the subject (titled "From Force to Persuasion") and in it, he decried human recourse to force as a "failure of civilization," citing examples such as "war, slavery, and governmental compulsion," and "a rule of men over women." It is "progressive societies" which have trusted most "the way of persuasion."[127] Persuasion is also the way in which Whitehead saw that God in God's

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[124] Whitehead, *Religion,* 55.
[125] Ibid., 153.
[126] Ibid., 159.
[127] Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (1933; repr., New York: The Free Press, 1967), 83.

goodness acts in the world. In this idea, he saw himself as echoing a great insight of Plato's:

> [Plato's] final conviction, towards the end of his life, that the divine element in the world is to be conceived as a persuasive agency and not as coercive agency… should be looked upon as one of the greatest intellectual discoveries in the history of religion.[128]

Whitehead, like Plato, recognized that the consequence of seeing this as God's chief means is that the achievement of God's aims depends in part upon the capability of other actualities to be persuaded:

> More than two thousand years ago, the wisest of men proclaimed that the divine persuasion is the foundation of the order of the world, but that it could only produce such a measure of harmony as amid brute forces it was possible to accomplish.[129]

Process theologians have worked with and expanded upon Whitehead's thoughts about God, including his thoughts about limits in God's power related to God's goodness and use of persuasion. Such a limit in God's control is one of several ways in which the conception of God in process theology may differ from the typical conceptions of many religious persons. In a book David Ray Griffin co-authored in 1976 with his former teacher John B. Cobb, five such ways are identified. Before discussing in more detail who or what process theology thinks God may be, it is useful to understand these five ideas about God which process theologians reject.

What God Is Not: Not a Cosmic Moralist, Unchanging and Passionless, Controlling, Status Quo Affirming, or Male

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[128] Ibid., 166.
[129] Ibid., 160.

First, the idea that God is a "cosmic moralist" is rejected. Process theology does not see God as "divine lawmaker and judge, who has proclaimed an arbitrary set of moral rules, who keeps records of offenses, and who punish offenders."[130]

Second, the idea of God as "unchanging" and a "passionless absolute" is also rejected.[131] The notion that God is perfect is not entertained as indicating that God cannot change. Instead, God is viewed as in relationship with the world such that while God has some influence and impact upon the world, the world also has some impact upon God.

A third rejection is of the idea that God has "controlling power."[132] God does not determine all which happens. The creation has considerable power and has an impact upon what happens. Fourth, not only does God not have full control, God also does not tacitly approve of all that happens either. God is not "sanctioner of the status quo."[133]

Finally, God is not a male. The identification of God as male stems from a long tradition of patriarchalism in religion. There is no reason to posit God in certain, or necessarily any, gender terms.

The point that God does not have "controlling power" needs further elaboration. As noted earlier, in addressing the existence of evil, personalist Brightman theorized "the Given" as a limit to God's power and ability to prevent evil. Griffin, as a process theologian, has a different idea regarding limitation in God's power which may account for evil. Griffin thinks that in creating the world, God's action was one of bringing order out of chaos rather than creating the world "out of nothing." The consequence suggested

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[130] John B. Cobb, Jr. and David Ray Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition (*Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1976), 8.

[131] Ibid.

[132] Ibid., 9.

[133] Ibid.

by this is that "our world was created out of a material with some power of its own, so that it would not be wholly subject to the divine will."[134] Griffin has also seen a limit in God's power due to God being a soul without a body. Having a body enables human beings to exercise power in certain controlling and manipulative ways. But, Griffin writes, while "we can say that the world as a whole is God's body," "God has no independent body distinct from the world, which could be used to exert controlling, constraining power *on* the world."[135]

What God Is: Responsive Creative Love That Is Persuasive, Promotes Enjoyment, and Is Adventurous

In terms of what God is, according to Cobb and Griffin's 1976 book, process theology sees God as responsive and creative love that is persuasive, promotes enjoyment, and is adventurous. This conception merits some further discussion.

Of course the idea that God is responsive and creative love is the reverse of the idea that God is unchanging and passionless as many theologians across the centuries have held. In Whitehead's process view, though, God is responsive to what happens in the world. And by responsive, Cobb and Griffin elaborate that:

> …the responsiveness includes a sympathetic feeling with the worldly beings, all of whom have feelings… God enjoys our enjoyments, and suffers with our sufferings. This is the kind of responsiveness which is truly divine and belongs to the very nature of perfection…[136]

But if God's responsiveness includes "sympathetic feeling," the question remains as to whether or how God acts. Cobb and Griffin note that Deism has been "a

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[134] David Ray Griffin, *God Exists But Gawd Does Not: From Evil to New Atheism to Fine-Tuning* (Anoka, MN: Process Century Press, 2016), 18.

. [135] David Ray Griffin, *Evil Revisited: Responses and Reconsiderations* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 25.

[136] Ibid., 48.

manifestation of the felt difficulty of speaking of divine activity in the world."[137] Deists generally believe that God set the world in motion but has let the world run without involvement. In process theology, it is thought that God is involved but God is not omnipotent in the sense of having all power or complete control. Rather it is noted that "Whitehead's fundamentally new conception of divine creativity in the world centers around the notion that God provides each worldly actuality with an 'initial aim."[138] The aim is based on what is the best possibility among all possibilities for each occasion or event. However, God does not impose realization of that aim upon actors in the world. Actors in the world are free to choose the action or actions which would serve to meet the aim or act contrary to it. Cobb and Griffin write that:

> … God seeks to persuade each occasion toward that possibility for its own existence which would be best for it, but God cannot control the finite occasion's self-actualization. Accordingly, the divine creative activity involves risk.[139]

Process theology sees God's use of persuasion rather than dominant control in a positive light. Cobb and Griffin explain:

> if we truly love others we do not seek to control them. We do not seek to pressure them with promises and threats involving extrinsic rewards and punishments. Instead we try to persuade them to actualize those possibilities which they themselves will find intrinsically rewarding. We do this by providing ourselves as an environment that helps open up new, intrinsically attractive possibilities.[140]

It is reasonable to inquire then as to what God's aim is for the creation. In process theology, God as mentioned is not envisioned as a cosmic moralist, and God's foremost aim for human beings is not the construction of moral character. Rather God's aim is seen as promoting creaturely enjoyment. This aim extends to all creatures capable of

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[137] Ibid., 50.
[138] Ibid., 53.
[139] Ibid.
[140] Ibid., 53-54.

experiencing the world, not just human beings. Cobb and Griffin explain the idea as follows:

> Process theology sees God's fundamental aim to be the promotion of the creatures' own enjoyment. God's creative influence upon them is loving, because it aims at promoting that which the creatures experience as intrinsically good.[141]

This is not to say, they hasten to add, that morality is unimportant. God wants the enjoyment of each creature to increase, not decrease, the enjoyment of others. Exhibiting generosity and love has the capacity to increase the enjoyment of others and of one's own inherently relational self. Greed or hate is destructive of enjoyment. As process theology sees it, "the development of moral attitudes is of extreme importance" but "it is a derivative concern, secondary to the primary value, which is enjoyment itself."[142]

Cobb and Griffin also call God's creative love "adventurous." There are two aspects of this that they note. First, as God is not seen as omniscient (in the sense of knowing the outcome of the process) nor omnipotent (in the sense of controlling the process), God takes a risk in creating order out of chaos and enabling creaturely freedom to have a major role in the process. Also God is seen as supportive of novelty in the process rather than as sustainer of the status quo. Novelty opens up the possibility of progress, a more advanced realization of God and creaturely aims.

GOD'S EXISTENCE: THE FINE-TUNING ARGUMENT

One of the strongest natural theology arguments for the existence of God is the fine-tuning argument. Process theology did not originate this argument and no particular judgment upon it is inherent in the theology. However, in his most recent (2019) book,

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[141] Ibid., 56.
[142] Ibid., 57.

David Ray Griffin makes a case for it, contrasts it with another explanation (the multi-verse theory), and discusses process theology's rejection of neo-Darwinism and its denial of cosmic progress.

The Case for Fine-Tuning and God's Existence

The fine-tuning argument is a form of teleological argument, that is, an argument in which something is explained in terms of the purpose which it serves rather than what causes it. The design argument, noted earlier in the discussions of Bowne and Brightman, is an example of a teleological argument. The potential pitfall for teleological arguments is that inferences to causal agency from purpose can be falsely drawn. The strength of the argument depends on the strength of the evidence and the theory which link the phenomena back to the cause that is being asserted.

Whereas evolution seeks to explain the biology of how life on earth changed over time, the "fine-tuning" argument regards the question of how it is that life here is viable at all. Griffin presents an overview of the evidence of how incredibly improbable conditions for life seem to be, though we have tended to take it for granted. As Griffin states, the apparent "fine-tuning' is "extremely fine."[143] He provides scientific findings for several constants. The specific values of these constants make for a universe which is hospitable for life; but if these values were only slightly different, it would not be. Of hydrogen's mass, for example, 0.0007 is converted into energy. Griffin quotes astronomer Martin Rees to the effect that "What is remarkable is that no carbon-based

[143] David Ray Griffin, *The Christian Gospel for Americans: A Systematic Theology* (Anoka, MN: Process Century Press, 2019), 39. Notwithstanding the title of the book and the fact that there are substantial scriptural citations in portions of the book, the discussions of fine-tuning, theodicy, and life after death do not depend upon scripture or Christian dogma.

biosphere could exist if this number had been 0.006 or 0.008 rather than 0.007."[144] Griffin concludes his case for fine-tuning by citing theoretical astrophysicist Ethan Siegel, who identifies that there are 26 or more fundamental constants which give us our universe.[145]

The seemingly small probabilities when multiplied times each other do suggest that a universe such as ours, which can support life, is wildly improbable. On this point, there appears to be a growing consensus. Therefore the main issue is the explanation of why this universe with life is here despite extraordinary odds against it. Is our universe a chance accident or "lucky" circumstance, or is there intelligence behind it, an intelligent tuner?

Griffin states that "the simplest explanation is that the fine-tuning was the work of an intelligent cosmic agent." [146] In support of the argument's credibility, Griffin quotes several scientists and intellectuals who are supportive of the fine-tuning argument.

- [When it comes to the universe] "The impression of design is overwhelming." (Physicist Paul Davies)
- [Divine mind] is "the only viable explanation [for] the origin of the laws of the universe." (Philosopher Antony Flew)
- "Some supercalculating intellect must have designed the properties of the carbon atom." (Astronomer Fred Hoyle)
- "[T]he more we get to know about our universe, the more the hypothesis that there is a Creator… gains in credibility as the best explanation of why we are here." (Mathematician, Philosopher of Science, and Christian apologist John Lennox)[147]

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[144] Ibid., 40.

[145] Ethan Siegel, "It Takes 26 Fundamental Constants to Give Us Our Universe, But They Still Don't Give Everything," *Forbes*, August 22, 2015.

[146] Griffin, *Christian Gospel*, 42.

[147] Ibid., 42. Griffin writes a paragraph on each individual, and the quotes shown are drawn from these paragraphs.

In addition, Griffin further explicates why it seems to be the best explanation by comparing it to the leading alternative, the multi-verse theory.

Griffin Regards the Multiverse Theory as Less Credible Than Theism

The leading alternative explanation to fine-tuning is a "multiverse" theory. The thought leading to this theory is that if our universe is the only universe, or it is only one of a less than exceptionally large number of universes, then the fine-tuned constant values of our universe are indeed highly improbable without any intelligence being at work behind it. However, if there are a vast number of universes, then the probability is much greater that at least one of them -- one of them happening to be us – came about by chance.

Griffin explains the multiverse theory as follows:

> According to this view, our universe is a tiny portion of a 'multiverse,' comprised of billions or even trillions of universes, each with different laws. Given so many universes, the argument goes, one of them was bound to just happen to have the laws and variables needed for life to emerge.[148]

Belief in God and belief in the multiverse theory of the universe are not inherently contradictory. God could be posited as the creative power behind the multiverse. However, if the multiverse theory were correct, it would provide an alternative explanation to theism for life here.[149]

According to Griffin, much of the support for the multiverse theory is rooted in a rejection of theism. Griffin labels it "the ultimate ad hoc hypothesis":

> An ad hoc explanation is one that exists for no reason other than saving a favored hypothesis. That is, it is ad hoc because it does not help explain any other phenomena. The multiverse idea, developed to explain away the apparent fine-

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[148] Ibid., 43.

[149] See Mary-Jane Rubenstein, *Worlds Without End: The Many Lives of the Multiverse* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 17.

> tuning of the universe in order to save the hypothesis that the universe has no divine creator, can be considered the ultimate ad hoc hypothesis.[150]

Griffin identifies "many scientific reasons" for rejecting the multiverse theory. He writes that the theory represents an "extreme extrapolation," "is not falsifiable," is a "science stopper," and "does not eliminate fine-tuning" but rather raises a host of unknowns about the laws or operations within this posited multiverse.[151] He also raises the point of simplicity again, in the form of the multiverse as a violation of Occam's Razor, which holds that all things being equal, a simpler explanation is preferred. Griffin writes that "To postulate billions – perhaps an infinite number – of universes, rather than a single deity, does seem to violate Occam's principle."[152]

Griffin concludes with an affirmation of support for the fine-tuning view. He writes that "This fine-tuning has provided the strongest empirical evidence ever provided for the existence of a divine creator" and indicates his view that the multiverse alternative is "absurd."[153]

Process Theology's Rejection of Neo-Darwinism With Its Denial of Cosmic Progress

In his 2019 book, Griffin follows his discussion of fine-tuning and the multiverse with a brief discussion of neo-Darwinism. Griffin identifies neo-Darwinism as "anti-theistic" and the claim of neo-Darwinism which Griffin chooses to dispute from a process theology standpoint is that evolution is wholly "undirected" and that it is "hence not progressive."[154] It is true that the evolutionary process has unfolded in some disorderly or dysfunctional ways which indicate a lack of detailed control. Griffin's objection from a

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[150] Griffin, *Christian Gospel*, 47.
[151] Ibid., 45-46.
[152] Ibid., 45.
[153] Ibid., 49.
[154] Ibid., 50.

process standpoint, though, is to the idea that the process is wholly unguided and has not exhibited progress overall. He writes that "Process theism rejects this view, instead portraying God as luring the world to greater complexity, for the sake of beings with richer experience."[155] To this point, human beings have attained the greatest complexity and seem to have the greatest capacity for rich experience.

ADDITIONAL GRIFFIN ARGUMENTS FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

In addition to the fine-tuning argument, Griffin includes several additional arguments for God's existence in a book titled *God Exists But Gawd Does Not*. The God which Griffin holds does not exist, and Griffin calls "Gawd," is in essence the God discussed earlier as "what God is not." The God who Griffin argues does exist is based on concepts of God from process theology.

Griffin addresses the fine-tuning argument in a chapter of the book titled "Teleological Order." It is beyond the scope of this paper to address other arguments he offers in detail. In sum, though, the additional arguments are:

- Mathematics – The universal laws of nature, discernible through mathematics, suggest the reality of God. The idea that mathematical forms "are actively prehended by God can explain the causality behind them that allows human beings to perceive them." [156]
- Morality – "The reason there is a universal minimal morality, Whitehead suggested, is because the universe contains a 'character of permanent rightness." Griffin argues that this rightness is of God.[157]
- Logic and Rationality – "… the existence of logical truth does seem to point to the existence of a divine actuality through which logical principles and truths can exist and be effective in the world."[158]
- Truth – Factual truth exists, and forms a reason "for affirming the reality of God," in addition to "mathematics, morality, logic, and rationality."

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[155] Ibid.
[156] Griffin, *God Exists*, 170.
[157] Ibid, 197.
[158] Ibid., 207.

- Religious Experience – "Religious experience in the usual sense, with its conscious experience of holiness or sacredness, can explain the origin and endurance of religions." Divine reality, though, "is universal but not omnipotent in the traditional sense," which allows for the diversity of experience.[159]
- Metaphysical and Cosmological Order – Griffin's discussion of these topics lends support for Whitehead's conclusion that apart from God, "there could be nothing new in the world, and no order in the world."[160]

THOUGHTS OF WHITEHEAD AND GRIFFIN REGARDING IMMORTALITY

Whitehead and Griffin both addressed the topic of immortality, although Griffin gave it considerably more attention. Whitehead addressed immortality briefly in passages in his 1926 book *Religion in the Making* and his 1933 book *Adventures in Ideas*. His most extensive reflection upon the subject took place for an Ingersoll Lecture on Immortality which he delivered in 1941.

Whitehead on Immortality

In *Religion in the Making*, Whitehead speaks to a belief which he says at the time is "generally held" -- "that a purely spiritual being is necessarily immortal." It seems important to note Whitehead's use of the word "necessarily" here. To say that one belief necessarily entails another is to make a strong assertion, and Whitehead objects to it in this case. He indicates that the doctrine he is developing in the book "gives no warrant for such belief," and "is entirely neutral on the question of immortality, or on the existence of purely spiritual beings other than God." If the question is to be decided, it cannot be decided based on the metaphysics he was proposing, but rather on the basis of "more special evidence, religious or otherwise, provided that it is trustworthy."[161]

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[159] Ibid., 240-241.
[160] Ibid., 271.
[161] Whitehead, *Religion,* 111.

In *Adventures of Ideas*, Whitehead briefly addresses "the soul of which Plato spoke." He writes that:

> How far this soul finds a support for its existence beyond the body is: -- another question. The everlasting nature of God, which in a sense is non-temporal and in another sense is temporal, may establish with the soul a peculiarly intense relationship of mutual immanence. Thus in some important sense the existence of the soul may be freed from its complete dependence upon the bodily organization.[162]

Here, Whitehead is speculating that the soul may not be dependent upon the body, but it needs a source of support for its existence, which can be from God.

In his 1941 Ingersoll lecture, Whitehead includes some remarks which are suggestive that persons can have an existence in another world. The nature of this existence is not explicated in any detail, and Whitehead's case is abstract to a degree that one hesitates to provide a definitive interpretation.[163] However, Whitehead's comments merit attention.[164]

The concept of value and its realization are crucial in Whitehead's lecture. He states that "Personality is the extreme example of the sustained realization of a type of value." He then seeks to simplify the Universe for purposes of discussion into two worlds. Some confusion is introduced into the lecture content as it appears that Whitehead uses four terms interchangeably to refer to the first of these worlds: "World of Change," a

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[162] Whitehead, *Adventures*, 208.

[163] Whitehead is notoriously challenging to read. According to Gary Dorrien's book (page 273), a prominent process theologian said after reading a book by Whitehead: "It is infuriating, and I must say embarrassing as well, to read page after page of relatively familiar words without understanding a single sentence."

[164] The following quotes and analysis pertaining to this lecture are found in, based on, pages 8 to 12 of Whitehead's lecture as contained in *Immortality*. Reprinted from the *Harvard Divinity School Bulletin*, Vol. xxxix, No. 14, 1942.

"World of Fact," a "World of Activity, or an "Active World." The second of the two worlds is consistently identified as a "World of Value."

The difference between the two worlds is that in the World of Change, the emphasis is upon "the multiplicity of mortal things," and the emphasis is upon "the Present." The World of Value "is in its nature timeless and immortal," and the emphasis is upon "persistence."

To realize value in the World of Change, though, "enduring" personal identities are developed. Whitehead states that "the survival of personal identity within the immediacy of a present occasion is a most remarkable" aspect of this world, as "it is a partial negation of its transitory character." If this survival of personal identity did not occur in the World of Change, then the idea of value in that world would be trivialized.

If value needs to be realized in the World of Change, then it obviously needs to be realized in the World of Value. This leads Whitehead to make the following statement, which indicates that "immortality personality" is found in that latter world:

> …the effective realization of value in the World of Change should find its counterpart in the World of Value – this means that temporal personality in one world involves immortal personality in the other.

Whitehead additionally indicates that "many persons" and God are part of the World of Value, and these many persons have an "immortal side":

> The World of Value exhibits the essential unification of the Universe. Thus while it exhibits the immortal side of the many persons, it also involves the unification of personality. This is the concept of God.

Whitehead then briefly elaborates on his conception of God as it relates to the subject. He emphasizes God's persuasive role:

> The World of Value involves "the persuasive coordination of the essential multiplicity of Creative Action [the World of Change]. Thus God, whose

> existence is founded in Value, is to be conceived as persuasive towards an ideal coordination.

He speaks as well of God receiving and unifying the many personalities who come to the World of Value.

> Also he [God] is the unification of the multiple personalities received from the Active World. In this way, we conceive the World of Value in the guise of the coordination of many personal individualities as factors in the nature of God.

This statement can be connected with his earlier statement that the World of Change (the Active World) involves temporal personality while the World of Value involves immortal personality. Whitehead is thus saying that God is receiving and unifying multiple personalities into a world which involves immortal personality. It does not seem a great leap to see evoked in Whitehead's "World of Value" something akin to the concept of heaven in religion.

Griffin on "Salvation" and Immortality

One of the chapters in Griffin's 2019 book is titled "Salvation." In the chapter he discusses several different ways in which the term "salvation" has been seen. He begins his discussion with what he thinks salvation is not. For Griffin, salvation is not the "standard Christian doctrine of salvation," which he says "has been one of the main reasons that Christian belief has fallen into disrepute." Also salvation is not that God chose to send Jesus to earth for the purpose of saving people from death through a "sacrificial" or "substitutionary atonement." Nor is about a salvation from hell and the promise of an afterlife for those who become Christians.

Griffin goes from this discussion to address what he does see as potential dimensions of Christian salvation. These dimensions can be considered without regard to what one thinks of scripture or Christianity.

One of these dimensions is what theologians call "realized eschatology." The idea is that we can participate in salvation right now, in terms of allowing for "a reign of God in individual hearts and social relations."[165] Griffin expresses his view that this seems to be the only form of salvation which much of "modern liberal theology" is willing to entertain.

Another dimension is a rescue from meaninglessness. Griffin writes of this dimension that it is a "freedom from the threat of meaninglessness through confidence that we are known and loved by the creator of the universe."[166] Griffin cites a book by H. Richard Niebuhr for putting forward this idea, and he brings process thought into the discussion by mentioning Whitehead's notion that rational beings do not like to think of themselves as only temporarily useful.

Griffin discusses two variants of this dimension. The first form which fits this idea of salvation has been called "objective immortality." The idea of objective immortality, Griffin writes, is that "one exists forever by virtue of being permanently an object of God's knowledge and love."[167] The second form is called "social immortality." The idea behind this form is that "we are objectively immortal in the hearts, minds, and memories of other people – that we will live on through their memories."[168] However,

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[165] Ibid., 336.
[166] Ibid.
[167] Ibid., 337.
[168] Ibid, 338.

Griffin notes that of the two forms, only objective immortality is really immortality; social immortality is not. Griffin writes:

> Reflection tells us that the human race will eventually perish. If so-called social immortality is the only kind of immortality we have, then our lives make no permanent contribution to anything, so the universe will eventually be as if we had never been. Being remembered by God alone provides genuine objective immortality.[169]

An additional dimension is what is often thought of when the term salvation is used. It is a survival of the person, or the "soul" beyond the life they currently experience. Griffin states that supernatural action is not required under Whitehead's thinking, but divine influence over time is seen as having a role. Griffin writes:

> The fact that supernatural intervention is unnecessary, however, does not imply the unimportance of divine influence. If the human soul now has the natural capacity to survive bodily death, it has this capacity because of billions of years of previous divine activity during which it brought the evolutionary process to the point at which human-like beings could emerge. Also, even if the soul now has the capacity to survive the death of its bodily organism, it would actually do so only because it is continually receiving fresh divine aims from God."[170]

Griffin is open to the possibility of consciousness surviving bodily death, both philosophically and in terms of evidence from parapsychology. He wrote books in 1997 and 1998 on these subjects.[171] In a 2017 book on process theology, Griffin summarizes his conclusion from his earlier investigations. Whereas evidence from psychical research was "highly ambiguous" in Whitehead's day, Griffin indicates that he found the evidence available now to be "quite strong." He concludes that "today the best empirical evidence,

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[169] Ibid.

[170] Ibid., 345.

[171] See Griffin, *Parapsychology, Philosophy, and Spirituality: A Postmodern Exploration* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997). See also Griffin, *Unsnarling the World-Knot: Consciousness, Freedom, and the Mind-Body Problem* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1998).

if approached in the light of a worldview that makes it possible, supports the believe that our conscious lives do continue after bodily death."[172]

In his 2019 book, Griffin discusses psychical research in general, and apparitions in particular, in a chapter prior to the one on salvation. In this earlier chapter, Griffin identifies "first-rate thinkers" who have historically endorsed psychical research, including psychologists, physicists, astronomers, biologists, and philosophers.[173] In the salvation chapter of his 2019 book, Griffin closes the chapter with evidence of life after death. He states that "Direct evidence for life after death can be provided by apparitions, mediums, apparent reincarnation, apparent possession, and out-of-body experiences."[174] The examples which Griffin provides in the chapter are for out-of-body experiences, of which there are two types: (1) ordinary circumstance experiences and (2) near-death out-of-body experiences. Griffin includes six case examples of individuals with near-death experiences in which those subject to the experience reported data which was accurate and corroborated by others in a position to know.

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As in the personalist chapter, this chapter has examined matters which can have a bearing upon hope, such as God's existence, nature, and powers, and the possibility of life after death. Among the traditional conceptions of God which the thinkers in these chapters challenge is God's omnipotence. In their view, God has power but not dominant control. To the extent they are correct, our hope for the future depends in part on us -- our

[172] David Ray Griffin, *Process Theology: On Postmodernism, Morality, Pluralism, Eschatology, and Demonic Evil* (Anoka, MN: Process Century Press), 104.
[173] Griffin, *The Christian Gospel*, 174.
[174] Ibid., 353.

willingness to heed God's persuasion to choose in accord with what is good, and the sufficiency of our problem-solving capability to meet looming challenges.

To address our capacity to make progress and solve problems, in the next chapter we turn to a humanist thinker, Steven Pinker. Pinker documents progress which human beings have made, and he has a conditionally positive view regarding our capacity to solve future problems, including climate change.

CHAPTER FOUR

HUMANISM, HUMAN PROGRESS, AND CLIMATE CHANGE

At the outset, an objective of this paper was to find a pathway toward hope which does not depend upon scriptural revelation. Hope was seen as a reasonable but uncerain optimism for the future of humanity and individuals. In a quest for a natural theology of hope, it was proposed that ideas from theistic personalism and process thought should be examined, as some of those ideas could be useful.

In Chapters Two and Three, the point was made that both theistic personalism and process thought affirm the existence of God but see limits in God's control. As noted earlier, Brightman proposed that God is the "source of the vast cosmic energies" and is "eternally creating" but yet is "limited both by the free will choices of other persons and by restrictions within his own nature." Process thought proposes that God is a God of creative love, and love by nature is not controlling. Hence God's work in the world with creatures is through persuasion toward what is best rather than through control, and creatures with free will have the freedom to be in tune and follow that persuasion or not.

In forging the idea of God's limited control, theistic personalists and process theologians were seeking to address a substantial theological problem, the problem of evil, both natural and moral. They developed a conception of God which preserves one's thought of God's goodness and power (but not control) and which squares that goodness and power with the reality of a world in which evil is seen. Faith in a God so conceived could function as grounds for hope.

However, a problem which some may see with the conception of God from theistic personalism and/or process thought is in the extent to which power seems to be

ceded to the creation, human beings in particular. It means that the hope for humanity rests, not wholly but in part, with us. In times when "persons" of personalism, or the "process" of process thought, seem to be going very badly astray (for example, in terms of the prevalence of evil or the dimming of prospects for the continuance of our planet and life upon it), the grounds for one's reasonable hope, which was known to be uncertain, may be considerably shaken. A wish for a God with more full control, or even disbelief in God, may set in. If the planet seems to be getting to a point where it looks like life can no longer be positively sustained, a God able to assert full control at will or a God of eschatological rescue may seem desirable.

At this time of writing, humankind's situation seems concerning. That impression is formed by the new presence of a global pandemic which has resulted in sickness and death, human beings kept at a social distance from one another, and damage or destruction of the livelihoods of many. The pandemic is layered on top of a situation in which human impacts upon the climate are identified by scientists as posing an existential threat, and symptoms of that impact are already being felt in wildfires and severe weather events. In process thought, life is regarded to some extent as a risk-taking adventure; but have the risks gone further, and is the adventure more alarming, than one might wish?

Which brings us back to the question of whether there are still grounds for a natural theology of hope. To this point I have focused on idieas from theisitic personalism and process thought. In this chapter, I bring an additional perspective into the discussion as we try to get some clarity about the situation we currently face. Given that personalism and process thought see God as having some limits in power, the role

which human beings play in the earthly drama is an important factor in whether we can have a realistic hope. Thus, additional information pertaining to where we stand is useful.

From a humanist/atheistic perspective, scholar Steven Pinker has recently written a book (2018) which can be seen as providing grounds for hope -- not in God, but in humanity itself. Pinker sees humanity as having made substantial progress over centuries and in recent decades, and he has a positive outlook regarding the human capacity to address problems. He puts forward some grounds for what he regards as "conditional optimism" that "humanity will rise to the challenge" of climate change.

Pinker's case will be set forth in broad outline in this chapter. His case will be used to further inform our discussion, particularly with regard to whether hope can credibly be invested in human beings in light of what past years and our current situation seem to indicate.

STEVEN PINKER: A HOPEFUL VIEW OF HUMAN PROBLEM-SOLVING

The best recent case I have seen affirming human progress -- which in turn may sows seeds for hope -- has been made by contemporary scholar and humanist/atheist Steven Pinker of Harvard University. In this section of the paper, an overview of some key points in his case will be provided. Pinker addresses the extent to which humanity has generally made progress as well as environmental and climate change concerns..

Overview of Pinker's Findings and Arguments Regarding Human Progress

Regarding human progress and our current situation, a different picture than is given by Moltmann is found in Steven Pinker's 2018 book *Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism, and Progress*. Pinker is a psychology professor who also happens to be a humanist and an atheist. Perhaps because he does not have a faith in God,

it may not be surprising that he makes a stronger case for human beings as a source of hope than theists who have a potentially ultimate backstop for their hope in God.

Pinker opens the preface to the book with a very dark series of quotes about our current situation from an initally unnamed source. The person quoted is speaking of people trapped in poverty, an education system which does not work, the prevalence of crime and gangs and drugs, and a global power structure which has brought spiritual and moral erosion. It is then revealed that the person being quoted is Donald Trump (and the occasion for the words is his inaugural speech). Pinker uses that quote as a launching point to note that there are intellectuals and lay people on the right and left wings of the ideological perspective who share a bleak assessment of where we are. The basis for their assessment may differ. But there is a "pessimism about the way the world is heading, cynicism about the institutions of modernity, and an inability to conceive of a higher purpose in anything other than religion."[175] And Pinker sets out to make a case with the provocative claim that this view is "wrong, wrong, flat-earth wrong, couldn't-be-more wrong."[176]

The purpose of Pinker's Part 1 of the book is to indicate the legacy of Enlightenment thought from Pinker's perspective, and provide some key conceptual points for the remainder of the book. The legacy of the Enlightenment as seen by Pinker is a principle "that we can apply reason and sympathy to enhance human flourishing."[177] While there may be few who would directly and explicitly attack these ideas – that is, reason, the capacity for sympathy, and the desirability of human flourishing -- Pinker

[175] Steven Pinker, *Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism, and Progress* (New York: Penguin Books, 2018), xv.
[176] Ibid.
[177] Ibid., 4.

notes other commitments which can undermine these ideals. He says that Enlightenment ideals "always struggle with other strands of human nature: loyalty to tribe, deference to authority, magical thinking, the blaming of misfortune on evildoers."[178]

For those who need a more concrete example of the anti-Enlightenment vision which causes Pinker concern, Pinker continues:

> The second decade of the 21st century has seen the rise of political movements that depict their countries as being pulled into a hellish dystopia by malign factions that can be resisted only by a strong leader who wrenches the country backward to make it 'great again.'[179]

But lest those who abhor right-wing authoritarian populism become too comfortable, Pinker continues that such movements:

> have been abetted by a narrative shared by many of their fiercest opponents, in which the institutions of modernity have failed and every aspect of life is in deepening crisis – the two sides in macabre agreement that wrecking these institutions will make the world a better place.[180]

What Pinker finds in shorter supply are visions which give recognition to past human accomplishments and provide a rationally-based problem-solving vision for the future.

In Part 2 of the book, over the course of 270 pages Pinker sets forth a case using quantitative data on the progress which humanity has made on many fronts. Below is a listing of the areas addressed, with my identification of brief quotes or simple facts to serve as illustrative representations of the more detailed case made in the book.

- ***Life expectancy*** – "in the mid-18th century, life expectancy in Europe and the Americas was around 35… Life expectancy for the world as a whole was 29."[181]

- ***Health*** – Researchers who have developed conservative estimates of lives saved by various scientific/medical breakthroughs by just one hundred or so

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[178] Ibid., 5.
[179] Ibid.
[180] Ibid.
[181] Ibid., 53.

scientists put the figure at around five billion lives saved so far.[182]

- ***Sustenance*** – "Though 13 percent of people in the developing world being undernourished is far too much, it's better than 35 percent, which was the level forty-five years earlier, or for that matter 50 percent, an estimate for the entire world in 1947…"[183]

- ***Wealth*** – "The Gross World Product today has grown almost a hundredfold since the Industrial Revolution was in place in 1820, and almost two hundredfold from the start of the Enlightenment in the 18th century… Indeed, the Gross World Product is a gross underestimate of the expansion of prosperity."[184]

- ***Inequality*** – "…the long-term trend in history since the Enlightement is for everyone's fortunes to rise. In addition to generating massive amounts of wealth, modern societies have devoted an increasing proportion of that wealth to benefiting the less well-off."[185]

- ***The Environment*** – "Not only have the disasters prophesied by 1970s greenism failed to take place, but improvements that it deemed impossible *have* taken place…"[186]

- ***Peace*** – "For most of human history, war was the natural pastime of governments, peace a mere respite between wars… at the dawn of the modern era, the great powers were pretty much always at war… [but]the last one pitted the United States against China in Korea more than sixty years ago."[187]

- ***Safety*** – Examination of factors such as homicide deaths, motor vehicle accident deaths, pedestrian deaths, plane crash deaths, deaths from falls, fire, drowning, and poision, occupational accident deaths, and natural disaster and lightning strike deaths through to 2015 leads to a conclusion that "we are now living in the safest time in history."[188]

- ***Terrorism*** – In 2015 "a global citizen was… more than 30 times as likely to have died in a car crash" than in an act of terrorism, despite the fact that global numbers are increased by the counting of deaths in civil war situations as terrorism if the deaths are due to non-government attacks on civilians.[189]

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[182] Ibid., 64.
[183] Ibid., 71.
[184] Ibid., 81.
[185] Ibid., 120.
[186] Ibid., 129.
[187] Ibid., 157.
[188] Ibid., 168.
[189] Ibid., 193.

- ***Democracy*** – "The world's 103 democracies in 2015 embraced 56 percent of the world's population, and if we add the 17 countries that were more democratic than autocratic, we get a total of two-thirds of the world's population living in free or relatively free societies, compared with less than two-fifths in 1950, a fifth in 1900, seven percent in 1850, and one percent in 1816."[190]

- ***Equal Rights*** – "The rights of racial minorities, women, and gay people continue to advance, each recently emblazoned on a milestone… But it's in the nature of progress that it erases its tracks, and its champions fixate on the remaining injustices and forget how far we have come."[191] "…in every part of the world, people have become more liberal" with regard to rights issues.[192]

- ***Knowledge*** – Worldwide there have been increases in literacy, basic education, years of schooling, and female literacy. "Intelligence Quotient (IQ) scores have been rising for more than a century, in every part of the world, at a rate of about three IQ points (a fifth of a standard deviation) per decade."[193]

- ***Quality of life*** – "Over the past century and a half, workers have increasingly been emancipated from their wage slavery, more dramatically in social-democratic Western Europe (where they now work 28 fewer hours a week) than in the go-getter United States (where they now work 22 fewer hours)."[194]

- ***Happiness*** – The evidence examined suggests that "Developed countries are actually pretty happy, a majority of all countries have gotten happier… dire warnings about plagues of loneliness, suicide, depression, and anxiety don't survive fact-checking."[195]

- ***Existential Threats*** -- "Those who sow fear about a dreadful prophecy may be seen as serious and responsible, while those who are measured are seen as complacent and naïve. Despair springs eternal. At least since the Hebrew prophets and the Book of Revelation, seers have warned their contemporaries about an imminent doomsday."[196] "Some threats are figments of cultural and historical pessimism. Others are genuine, but we can treat them not as apocalypses in waiting but as problems to be solved."[197]

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[190] Ibid., 203.
[191] Ibid., 214-215.
[192] Ibid., 227-228.
[193] Ibid., 240.
[194] Ibid., 249.
[195] Ibid., 283.
[196] Ibid., 293.
[197] Ibid., 291.

In the third part of the book, Pinker addresses reason, science, and humanism as grounds for the progress which he has presented. He begins this part with the statement "Ideas matter."[198] Regarding reason, a critical distinction which Pinker makes is that "*no Enlightenment thinker ever claimed that humans were consistently rational.*"[199] It is risky to use the word "ever," but we get his point. Pinker notes instead that:

> What they argued was that we *ought* to be rational, by learning to repress the fallacies and dogmas that so readily seduce us, and that we *can* be rational, collectively if not individually, by implementing institutions and adhering to norms that constrain our faculties, including free speech, logical analysis, and empirical testing. And if you disagree, then why should we accept *your* claim that humans are incapable of rationality?[200]

Pinker defines humanism as "the goal of maximizing human flourishing – life, health, happiness, freedom, knowledge, love, richness of experience."[201] Pinker is aware that some of his readers might wonder who would oppose goals such as these, especially human flourishing. However, Pinker sees at least two "perenially seductive alternatives":

- **Theistic morality** – "the idea that morality consists in obeying the dictates of a deity, which are enforced by supernatural reward and punishment in this world or in an afterlife."[202]

- **Romantic heroism** – "the idea that morality consists in the purity, authenticity, and greatness of an individual or a nation."[203]

Pinker closes his book by paying tribute to the considerable progress which human beings have made. "We are born into a pitiless universe, facing steep odds against life-enabling order and in constant jeopardy of falling apart… we eke out victories

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[198] Ibid., 349.
[199] Ibid., 353.
[200] Ibid.
[201] Ibid., 410.
[202] Ibid., 419.
[203] Ibid.

against the forces that grind us down, not least the darker part of our own nature."[204] It is a "heroic story."[205]

PINKER ON THE ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Within his chapter on the environment, Pinker devotes the first half to arguing that "we must not acccept the narrative that humanity inexorably despoils every part of the environment."[206] In this part of the chapter, he documents hard-fought environmental protection victories and calls attention to several instances of environmental doomsaying in the past which failed to materialize as expected. However, he sets up the second half of the chapter on climate chanage with the following statement. "An enlightened environmentalism must face the facts, hopeful or alarming, and one set of facts is unquestionably alarming: the effect of greenhouse gases on the earth's climate."

Pinker begins by devoting several paragraphs to a recitation of facts which will be well-known to those who have paid attention to what the vast majority of scientists with climate-related expertise have been saying. For example, he cites the fact that the concentration of carbon dioxide has risen from about 270 parts per million (ppm) before the industrial revolution to over 400 ppm. There are natural sinks which can take in CO2, such as the oceans and plants, but these "cannot keep up with the 38 billion tons we dump into the atmosphere each year." The result is a rise in temperature with considerable negative consequences for the globe -- and the higher the rise, the worse the anticipated consequences. The idea that human beings are the major cause of the rising temperatures

[204] Ibid., 452-453.
[205] Ibid., 453.
[206] Ibid., 136. All quotes of Pinker on this page are from page 136 of Pinker's book.

that are seen and projected has been "vigorously challenged," Pinker states, but convincingly refuted.[207]

Besides climate denialism, Pinker notes what he sees as two psychological impediments to effectively responding to the problem. One is that people have trouble thinking in terms of scale – which actions have enough impact to really make a difference. A failure to think this way means that "one can be satisifed with policies that accomplish nothing."[208] The other is moralistic. The notion is that we can address the problem by convicing people/nations through moral persuasion to do the right thing and making sacrifices. Pinker agrees that climate change is a moral issue, but he argues that it will not be addressed by "moralizing." Pinker states that "it's unwise to let the fate of the planet hinge on the hope that billions of pepole will simultaneously volunteer to act against their interests."[209]

Pinker sees the problem as one of assessing "how to get the most energy with the least emission of greenhouse gases."[210] Humankind has been doing that over time, in moving from dry wood burning to coal and then petroleum and natural gas. Consequently:

> The ratio of carbon to hydrogen… steadily fell, and so did the amount of carbon that had to be burned to release a unit of energy… Carbon intensity for the world as a whole has been declining for half a century.[211]

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[207] Ibid., 137.

[208] Ibid., 140.

[209] Ibid., 141. See also Jonathan Shaw, Controlling the Global Thermostat: Coming to terms with climate change's relentless, long term-fallout," in *Harvard Magazine*, Nov./Dec. 2020. On page 44 of the article, professor of political economy James Stock makes a similar point. He indicates that consumers are not going to "go green" only to do what is right. Rather "You have to make the consumer want green power… That means it has to be affordable." For example, electric vehicles will become more prevalent when they are cheaper to own and consumers have more reason to enjoy them, such as based on "much better acceleration."

[210] Ibid., 142.

[211] Ibid., 143.

However, it is not enough. Using policy and technology, the trend to decarbonization needs to be pushed much further to "deep decarbonization." To accomplish, that carbon pricing is seen as necessary. This will make fossil fuels less attractive relative to alternatives. Also nuclear power needs to be pursued. This is the "world's most abundant and scalable carbon-free energy source," and Pinker devotes several pages to a discussion of its importance and obstacles to it, including the point that it "presses a number of psychological buttons" of people who distrust it.[212] In addition he addresses the need for carbon capture, which includes actions ranging from restoring or planting forests to geo-engineering. Climate engineering involves the use of fleets of airplanes spraying particles into the stratosphere for the purpose of reducing the earth's temperature. The technology is available (though further technological advancement may be possible), it is achievable at low costs, and it could provide some rapid results in temperature cooling. There are concerns about unintended consequences from it and its availability may lead to a disastrous complacency regarding the need for decarbonization and other means. However, Pinker cites physicist David Keith, an expert in the area, as indicating that the climate engineering could be done in a way that is moderate, responsive, and temporary.[213]

Part of Pinker's thinking, too, is that the technical know-how which exists now cannot be assumed as "the best the world can do."[214] Looking at the human capacity to

[212] Ibid., 146-147.

[213] Ibid., 153. David Keith is also cited in the November/December 2020 Harvard magazine article on climate change, including some of his thoughts on the positive aspects and concerns regarding geo-engineering.

[214] Ibid., 150.

make technological progerss, there is reason to think that more innovations will come in response to this crisis.

Pinker writes in conclusion that he is sometimes asked whether he thinks "that humanity will rise to the challenge" of climate change. Using a distinction Pinker says was made by economist Paul Romer between complacent optimism and conditional optimism, Pinker counts himself a conditional optimist on climate change. We can rise to the challenge, but it will require a shift from complacency to a sense of urgency.[215]

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Agree with Pinker or not, he presents data worth consideration and the book is thought-provoking. A thoughtful data-driven case such as Pinker's may provide a counterweight to the pessimistic outlook which following the daily news may evoke.

If God's power is one of persuasion or limited in some ways, what human being seem to be capable of, or not capable of, impacts our future. Pinker, as an atheist, believes that no deity exists to be of any help, but he has a positive view of past human progess and he is conditionally optimistic about what human beings can do with regard to climate change. The condition he sets upon his optimism represents an important point to consider. He says he has conditional hope "if we sustain the benevolent forces of modernity that have allowed us to solve problems so far, including societal prosperity, wisely regulated markets, international governance, and investments in science and technology."[216] In the next chapter, we will examine whether there are grounds for hope, both in ourselves and in God.

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[215] Ibid., 154-155.
[216] Ibid., 155.

CHAPTER FIVE: A NATURAL THEOLOGY OF HOPE IN HUMANKIND AND GOD

In Chapter One, five issues were identified, which, from the perspective taken in this paper, a natural theology of hope should address.

1. The concept of God
2. God's existence
3. God's goodness and power as grounds for hope,
4. Human capabilities as grounds for hope, and
5. The value of life and persons.

In this concluding chapter, ideas from the personalist, process thought, and humanist thinkers covered in Chapters Two through Four will be highlighted for their applicability to these issues. While the discussion draws substantially from those substantive chapters, some elaboration or additional thought is included. The goal of the chapter is to show at a big picture level how ideas from these schools of thought provide a plausible and reasonable basis and path toward a natural theology of hope, invested both in God and in us.

1. THE CONCEPT OF GOD

A substantial contribution of personalism and process theology is the conceptual work done regarding who or what God is not. In Chapter Three on process thought, for example, five often-thought (or traditionally assigned) characteristics of God which are rejected in process thought are identified: (1) God as "cosmic moralist," (2) God as the unchanging and passionless absolute, (3) God's omnipotent control, (4) God as

sanctioner of the status quo, and (5) God as a male. Bowne and especially Brightman's work can also be seen as rejecting one through four.[217]

The benefits of this conceptual thinking for a theology of hope is that the negations are of attributes that have presented obstacles to belief in God's existence or goodness. As Bowne noted, "conscience alone has proved a sturdy disturber in theological systems, and one great source and spring of theological progress has been the need of finding a conception of God which the moral nature could accept."[218] It is God as cosmic moralist, defined as a "dictator," which atheist Steven Pinker explicitly rejects in his discussion of theistic moralism. This moralism consists of dictates of a deity, presumably found in scripture, and the extent of compliance with these dictates is held to impact one's rewards or punishments in this life and/or one's fate in eternity. However, the writings of the personalist and process thinkers addressed in this paper indicate that this is not the nature of the deity they believe in either. They keep to what they think are God's essential attributes, and largely do so without feeling a need to explain away any contradicting scriptural content or dogma.

As a starting point for what God is, Bowne saw God as intelligent and personal. In seeing God as a "person," Bowne did not mean having a form of any kind, but rather as having "self-knowledge and "self-control." For Brightman, God is a "Person, supremely conscious, supremely valuable, and supremely creative." Brightman uses the word "supremely" indicating that the attribute referenced is taken to the highest extent, otherwise recognizing restrictions such as what is logically not possible, the free will choices of other persons, and any restrictions within God's nature. In process thought,

[217] In reviewing the writings of Bowne and Brightman I did not notice any thought given to God's gender. Throughout their writing male pronoun choices are used in reference to God and humankind.

[218] Bowne, *Philosophy*, 24.

God is creative love that is persuasive and promotes enjoyment and adventure in the creation.

2. GOD'S EXISTENCE

Through the use of reason, God's existence cannot be proved or demonstrated. Rather arguments can be advanced which explain why it is reasonable to think that God does exist, and potentially why it is as or more credible than competing hypotheses.

There are two major themes in the arguments for God's existence by Bowne and Brightman. One is the intelligibility of the universe. Our use of science, our study of the cosmos, has been rooted in a notion that there is an underlying reality to things that is available to be intelligibly understood. We have been rewarded greatly in finding many intelligible patterns. In this, Bowne sees a world-ground that is intelligent and personal. To believe in atheistic materialism rather than theism, Bowne wrote that "then we have to assume a power which produces the intelligible and rational, without being itself intelligent and rational." (See Chapter Two).

In additional to the rationality of the universe, Brightman's arguments included the emergence of novelty, the nature of personality, the evidence of values, the evidence of religious experience, and systematic coherence of belief. A brief overview of the thrust of these arguments was also provided in Chapter Two.

An additional argument made by process theologian Griffin is based on scientific findings which indicate incredible odds against life in our universe. There are numerous constants which needed to be just so in order for life to emerge, and the multiplication of these low probabilities leads to enormous odds against it.

An argument against seeing fine-tuning as support for God's existence is made by Steven Pinker in his book. Pinker states that the fine-tuning argument exhibits the fallacy of post-hoc reasoning. An example he provides of this fallacy is "the Megabucks winner who wonders what made him win against all the odds." The problem with this, Pinker notes, is because "*Someone* had to win, and it's only because it happened to be him that he's wondering in the first place."[219]

One can see Pinker's point, but in a meaningful way, his example is not the same. Megabucks is a game consciously formed such that there will be a winner. In contrast, we do not know that we are/were part of a game. We do not know whether or not there had to be a "winner," because we do not truly know whether there would have to be life anywhere which would overcome the vast odds which seem stacked against it. And so it is reasonable for us to hypothesize that as there are organizing entities for Megabucks games, there may have been an organizer of a situation in our universe in which there would indeed be a "winner."

It is true, though, that our existence does not prove the existence of God. A competing "multi-verse" theory could be correct and explain our existence. That is, it may be that if there is a vast number of universes, life such as ours could be practically inevitable somewhere. We are still extraordinarily lucky, then, to have it here, if we treasure life. But if we treasure life, and there was an organizing person (God) behind the overcoming of such odds, we are extraordinarily blessed. Which it is, we cannot be certain based on present knowledge. For the reasons provided by Griffin though (see Chapter 3), the hypothesis of God has advantages over the multi-verse theory. The fine-

[219] Pinker, *Enlightenment*, 424.

tuning argument, as well as other arguments advanced by the personalist and process theologians, provide reasonable grounds for a belief that God as conceived in theistic personalism and/or process theology exists.

3. GOD'S GOODNESS AND POWER AS GROUNDS FOR HOPE

The world exhibits both goodness and evil. A theist may ask the atheist what the basis is for all that is good in the world, thinking that God ought to be the answer. The atheist may ask the theist to explain why there is moral and natural evil in the world, thinking that the correct answer is that there is no God, let alone a good one. For some, the existence of that which is good may be too much taken for granted, while for others, the existence of that which is evil is seen as a key obstacle to belief in God.

As has been seen in Chapters 2 and 3, the theistic personalist and process thinkers discussed have given considerable thought to the problem of evil. Persuaded of God's goodness, they have examined concepts such as God's omniscience and omnipotence as a means to understand whether there are limits in God's ability to know all and limits in God's power.

They all have seen creaturely freedom and power to act on this plane of reality as a significant source of power. They have recognized that it is logically contradictory to think that God could both provide human beings with free will and the ability to act, yet also be in full control of what happens. Consequently human beings can act in futherance of what is good but can be a source of evil.

However, Edgar Brightman thought that this is only a partial response to the existence of evil. As seen in Chapter Two, he hypothesized the existence of an element within God he called "the Given" which constitutes a problem for God. What happens in

the world is not fully under God's control. Brightman hypothesized, however, that God would "make an increasingly better conquest of it [The Given] throughout eternity." Although not completely eliminating it, the Given would "in no way imperil the divine ideals and purposes."

As was seen in Chapter Three, in process theology it is thought that God did not create the world out of nothing, but rather brought a degree of order out of chaos. There was a risk in so doing and in enabling creaturely freedom to have an important role to play in the process. The value of creaturely enjoyment justified the risk. Griffin points also to limitations which may be involved based on the fact that God is a soul without a body. God's on-going role in the creation is seen as providing an "initial aim" for each occasion, which is the best available possibility for it. God lures us to that aim, but does not impose it. God's use of persuasion rather than dominant control, being a loving response, is seen as a positive thing. It is a loving response because love can be persuasive but is not controlling. As noted in Chapter Three, Whitehead indicated that the idea of the divine in terms of persuasive as opposed to coercive agency did not originate with him. He found it in Plato, and regarded it as "one of the greatest intellectual discoveries in the history of religion."

From a personalist perspective, Borden Parker Bowne hit some of the same notes – a view of God's risk-taking, and that God acts in ways which love implies – in words he wrote in 1909:

> It was an awful responsibility that was taken when our human race was launched with its fearful possibilities of good and evil. God thereby put himself under infinite obligation to care for his human family… the attempt to conceive of God as love has compelled the giving up of those absolutist notions of divine sovereignty which formed the foundation of theology a hundred years ago… A

> God of love must do works of love and be all that love implies. Else love is not love.[220]

4. HUMAN CAPABILITIES AS A GROUND FOR HOPE

As we have seen, theistic personalism and process thought provide some important grounds for hope in God. They propose frameworks for envisioning reality and God (keying on "persons" or on "process"), a strong working concept of God, and arguments for God's existence. Also in conceptualizing God's power as finite (Brightman), or, following Plato, seeing God's power as persuasive (Whitehead), the two theologies offer potential solutions to the problem of evil. Historically this problem has been seen as one of the major arguments reducing the probability that there is a benevolent God in which one may invest hope.

For some people, though, it may be more of a challenge to believe in humanity than in God. That is not meant in terms of existence, of course, but rather in terms of thinking that human beings have a nature and capacity which can enable us to address the myriad challenges which life presents. Troubling times, such as are presented by wars, pandemics, authoritarian leaders, or a looming issue such as climate change, can exacerbate an underlying negativity toward human beings or the institutions and means they have employed to date. Given that theistic personalism and process theology both see limits in God control and see some power which humanity holds in its own hands, whether human beings can exercise their freedom responsibly is a key matter.

Theistic personalists Bowne and Brightman and process philosopher Whitehead valued persons and respected science in their philosophical work, and maintained hope

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[220] Borden Parker Bowne, *Studies in Christianity* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1909), 95.

after a world war and a pandemic. Moreover, theistic personalists and process theologians see God as having a persuasive role which can positively influence human beings and events. Steven Pinker, an atheist and self-defined humanist, was found to make a strong recent case that human beings have shown a capacity for progress, and have a problem-solving ability which provides ground for hope in the future.

The human capabilities which Pinker in effect points to include reason, science, technology, and humanist values. I respect Pinker's evidence-based approach and his assessment that the human condition has generally improved, and his conclusion that conditional hope is warranted with regard to our ability to respond to climate change. I think that conditional hope is merited for other problems we face, such as racism and pandemics. Science and technology plus a humanistic or spiritual concern for human and planetary flouishing will be key. But there are also obstacles to overcome. We have grounds for hope, but the force of the obstacles also reminds us of the uncertainty of our hope in ourselves.

Science and Technology

There is no question that science and technology can be used for purposes of destruction. The scientific breakthroughs and technological developments that have brought weapons capable of inflicting ever-increasing levels of damage and death indicates the point. In his 2019 book on hope, broadly overviewed in Chapter One, Jürgen Moltmann goes further than this, blaming Western civilization's orientation to science and technology for our ecological problems. He states that our ecological crisis is "fundamentally a crisis wrought by Western scientific and technological civilization."[221]

[221] Moltmann, *Spirit of Hope*, 8.

One wonders which scientific and technological advances that involve substantial use of energy Moltmann would have had Western civilizaton forego. Should we have eschewed electrical power and continued to live our evenings by fireplaces and candlelight? How about heating and cooling systems? Should we have let the inventions of the automobile go unused, and traveled mostly by horse and buggy? I agree with Pinker, who writes that:

> …it's time to retire the morality play in which modern humans are a vile race of despoilers and plunderers who will hasten the apocalypse unless they undo the Industrial Revolution, renounce technology, and return to an ascetic harmony with nature.[222]

Instead, Pinker advocates that:

> … we treat environmental protection as a problem to be solved: how can people live safe, comfortable, and stimulating lives with the least possible pollution and loss of natural habitats? Far from licensing complacency, our progress so far at solving this problem emboldens us to strive for more. It also points to the forces that pushed this progress along.[223]

Pinker's point echoes something written by process theologians Cobb and Griffin, albeit back in 1976:

> Process theology holds that science guided by imaginative vision can find ways whereby a relatively large (though certainly limited) human population can enter into new and finer forms of enjoyment that are compatible with sharing the earth with many other species.[224]

I think that Pinker's case for the net good which science and technology have achieved to date serves as a compelling rebuttal to overreaching critics. In 2020 we can see a world which waits for scientific research and findings on the coronavirus. From science and techology, the world sought: information on the nature of the virus, recommendations on how we can prevent the virus' spread, the development of tests

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[222] Pinker, *Enlightenmen*t, 134.
[223] Ibid.
[224] Cobb and Griffin, *Process Theology*, 149.

which could detect the virus and mass production of the tests to make them widely available, information on how to best treat patients needing hospitalization, and the development of treatments and vaccines which might reduce the spread of the virus, prevent infections, and reduce fatalities. Countries and jurisdictions which took the virus seriously, listened to scientific advice on how to prevent the spread, and developed early and expansive testing capabilities, have been the most successful in tamping down the spread and reducing their fatalities.[225] Countries in which leaders ignored scientific warnings about the virus, or thought that they instinctively knew better than scientists how to handle the situaiton, experienced more severe outcomes.

Further, if we are to address the climate change problem with some success, science and technology will be key. Substantial scientific research and technological development has already gone into matters such as electric vehicles, higher-mileage gasoline vehicles, and energy-efficient building designs. Further advances can be anticipated. In addition, science and technology may enable relatively safe usage of certain strategies, such as increased use of nuclear power or geoengineering.

Additional Thoughts Related to Human Action and Climate Change

Excessive confidence in science to fix things (for example, the notion that at some later point geoengineering will give us an easy inexpensive "fix" to the climate change problem) can lead to complacency. Eschatological religious belief that God will end or fix all things sometime soon can also similarly lead to complacency on climate change and other matters. Between the poles of such complacency and despair, a natural

[225] In addition, countries with the greatest success tended to have a high regard for the common good in such situations and there was a willingness to experience some personal inconvenience for that good.

theology can provide a basis for conditional hope in God and human beings acting together.

Whitehead spoke of the pessism which had gripped some thinkers regarding the potential looming catastrophe of the Malthusian Law of Population. It had been feared that the growth in population would rapidly outstrip our means of subsistence. But Whitehead noted that it was based on some assumptions which did not prove out. For example, it did not take into account the possibility of human restraint. It also assumed "that within the span of time required for the operation of the Malthusan Law, sudden increases of productive power, due to improved technology will not be introduced."[226] Thus, it was not an "iron necessity," although it was "a possibility inherent in the facts."[227]

The ending paragraphs of Whitehead's *Science and the Modern World* are relevant to our discussion. Whitehead is critical of "middle class pessimism over the future of the world," and he states that "it is among the merits of science that it equips the future for its duties."[228] He sees in the unfolding of science "the power of reason, its decisive influence on the life of humanity."[229] He acknowledges the powerful influences upon generations of great conquerors in history, but writes that their influence "shrinks to insignficance" compared to changes in habits and thoughts which have stemmed from great thinkers.[230]

In sum, when it comes to climate change, a really bad outcome is -- as Whitehead said of Malthusian Law -- "a possibility inherent in the facts," but that does not yet seem

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[226] Whitehead, *Adventures*, 73.
[227] Ibid., 74.
[228] Whitehead, *Science*, 207.
[229] Ibid., 208.
[230] Ibid.

an "iron necessity." In light of Pinker's assessment of our past progress and our future potential, and the relative confidence of theistic personalism and process thought in reason, science, and God's persuasive assistance, there is cause for a conditional hope. Though still conditional, that hope is increased by a realization that God exists and lures us to better possibilities. Whether through prayer, meditation, contemplation, or nudges from our daily experience, we can hear and respond. With faith in God, there is basis for conditional hope in what God and human beings can still do together.

5. THE VALUE OF LIFE AND PERSONS

In a way, if a case for God is made with the fine-tuning argument, the extraordinary exactitude which was required to enable life here implies a certain value to life. But how much value? Are human beings worthy of having hopeful desires, possibly including further life after death?

It would seem natural that theistic personalists, given a belief in God and a philosophical outlook which sees personhood as the key to interpreting reality, would attach substantial significance and value to human life. Along those lines, Bowne once wrote that "Life itself, with all its normal forms and interests, represents the divine will and purpose; from it God is never absent."[231] Brightman believed that we all find "some glimmer of something worth living for," and that a pessismist in "moments of gloomiest despair is a witness to the value of life, for there would be no sense in his gloom if he had not somehow seen the possibility of something better than the present.[232] In taking personality seriously, Brightman saw the seeding of hope:

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[231] Borden Parker Bowne, *The Immanence of God.* (New York and Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Company, 1905), 47.

[232] Brightman, *Is God a Person?*, 40-41.

> Any philosophy or religion or political theory that treats personality seriously and sacredly has in it the seeds of hope – hope that humanity may see that nature and values are one world, a world which can be realized effectively only by the labors of reason and love, human and divine.[233]

Taking personality "seriously and sacredly" was central to the theistic personalism of Martin Luther King Jr., who studied at Boston University with Brightman. King's focus was upon what the sacredness of persons meant in considering the practical circumstances of those victimized by racism and oppression. King's contribution to personalism has been seen as his "relentless efforts to apply the basic principles of personalism to solving the dehumanizing social problems" through his ministry and his leadership in the civil rights movement.[234]

In process philosophy, Whitehead wrote that "At the base of our existence is the sense of 'worth,'" and "our experience is a value experience." [235] There is value in the intensity of our experience. As dryly intellectual as he could be, it can come as a surprise to find Whitehead saying in his work that "Life is the enjoyment of emotion, derived from the past and aimed at the future."[236] Emotion both "issues from, and it issues towards. It is received, it is enjoyed, and it is passed along, from moment to moment."[237]

"Feeling," he says, "is the reception of expression," with expressions being data from the environment. "[238]A living body," he continues, has "two sides of experience, namely expression and feeling." The possibility of enjoyment is felt by more than just human beings. "In animals we can see emotional feeling," he wrote, and he attaches value to this. "The distinction between men and animals is in one sense only a difference

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[233] Edgar Brightman, *Nature and Values* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1945), 166.
[234] Rufus Burrow, Jr. *God and Human Dignity: The Personalism, Theology, and Ethics of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 69.
[235] Whitehead, *Modes of Thought*, 108, 110.
[236] Ibid., 167.
[237] Ibid.
[238] Ibid., 23.

of degree."[239] However, he also notes the extent of the degree constitutes a huge difference. Perhaps this is what led him to state in the *Adventure of Ideas* that "The importance of man as the supreme example of a living organism is beyond question."[240]

Value in life and for persons also comes from transcendence and relationship. Whitehead writes that "There must be value beyond ourselves."[241] This can be relationship with others or with deity. Whitehead again sees what he calls "the higher animals" as showing "every sign of understandings and of devotions which pass beyond the immediate enjoyments of immediate fact," although still seeing a great difference in terms of the "influence of reflective experience" between animals and man.[242] But compared to animals, human beings are "amateurs in sense experience."[243] Whitehead does not mean a denigation of human beings in writing that "human beings are merely one species in the throng of existence"; he attaches significance to the throng, "the animals, the vegetables, the microbes, the living cells, the inorganic physical activities."[244]

But one hope which some human beings have, for themselves and/or for others, is hope for an afterlife. While not a major theme in theistic personalism and process thought, it is given some favorable attention, and is addressed in the next section.

God's Endowment of Creatures with a Survivable Soul

[239] Ibid., 27.
[240] Whitehead, *Adventures*, 24.
[241] Whitehead, *Modes*, 102.
[242] Ibid., 103.
[243] Ibid., 113
[244] Ibid., 112.

Francis McConnell wrote an essay about "Bowne and Personalism" for a symposium in which he addressed Bowne's view of life after death. McConnell wrote that:

> On personalistic principles as well as on religious conviction Bowne was a firm believer in personal immortality. He regarded this theme as legitimate for the exercise of religious imagination, but as for himself, he decleared that what appealed to him most in the thought of another life was the possibility that that there absolute good will will rule all things, especially the contacts of human persons with one another. He believed that one glory of humanity was the possibility of being suddenly improved… One of his sentences which I recall most distinctly was that Love met us as we came into the world and Love will meet us as we go into the next."[245]

As was seen in Chapters 2 and 3, Brightman and Whitehead were invited to give the Ingersoll lecture on Immortality, in 1925 and 1942 respectively. Their remarks indicated an opennes to the possibility of persons surviving after death. A key issue for both in their lectures is "value," specifically the value given to conscious selves or personality. Brightman stated that "if value experiences give us truth about the structure of the universe, then the human spirit may have its eternal place in the value of the Absolute Spirit.[246] (In another work, Brightman saw God's goodness as the main grounds for hope for life after death). In his Ingersoll lecture, Whitehead indicated that to realize value in our world, "enduring" personal identities are developed; temporal personality in our world "involves immortal personality in the other"; and God receives "multiple personalities" into the World of Value.

David Ray Griffin discusses more than one way in which one might in a sense "survive" after death. There is "social immorality" whereby we live on the memories of those who knew us. There is "objective immortality," which holds that "one exists

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[245] McConnell, *Personalism in Theology*, 38, 39.
[246] Brightman, *Immortality*, 30.

forever by virtue of being permanently an object of God's knowledge and love." Griffin devotes most of his attention, however, to the survival of the person, the survival of the soul. He has done a substantial review of psychical research and thinks that belief in life after death has some credibility.

CONCLUSION

In his 1945 work *Nature and Values,* Edgar Brightman wrote that:

> Persons look to the future, hoping and longing that in it what we love will continue to be, and that what we hate will cease to be, and that the future will be better than the past as long as betterment is possible.

In looking to that future, our hope can be for the future of the planet, for society, and for persons. In this paper, ideas have been presented from personalism, process thought, and humanism which may be useful for constructing one's own natural theology of hope. This uncertain or conditional hope is invested in God and in human beings.

Depending on their scriptural interpretation, some theists may have difficulty investing a portion of their hope in humankind, discounting human potential and/or believing God to be in full control. Atheists, on the other hand, think there is no hope in a being they believe not to exist, but may -- as Steven Pinker does -- see hope in a long-term record of human progress and in human factors such as reason, science, technology, and humanism.

Christianity has a dual contradictory attitude toward human beings. We are held to be created in the image of God, and Psalm 8:3-5 places humanity in a high regard. But Christianity also has an original sin narrative which entailed a need for humanity to be rescued from its fall into sin. Problems with this include that the notion of an on-going stain of culpability for the actions of a mythical first couple has never made sense in

terms of morality and justice, and that science has negated the notion that human beings were created and lived in a world of perfection prior to any alleged "fall." Nonetheless, it is not an uncommon refrain in some Christian circles that human beings are inveterant sinners and have no intrinsic salvific value. Worth is bestowed by faith in Christ.

Certainly it is true, as Christianity holds, that human beings sin and are capable of horrific evil. Our life experience and and human history demonstrate that. But the human capacity for ill is not the whole story. Human beings are also capable of great good; and on average, most human beings are not wholly saintly nor wholly evil. "Like most human beings," Stephen Unwin once wrote that he placed himself "somewhere in that large moral spectrum between Mother Teresa and a managed health care excecutive."[247] That seems to be a reasonably realistic wry appraisal when it comes to most human beings.

Among atheists also, there is a dual and seemingly contradictory attitude in seeking to hold a humanist and a materialist conception of reality. Some of the most valued attributes of human beings – reason, inventiveness, courage, moral understanding, self-sacrifice – seem hard to explain under a materialist view. In this vein, Brightman once commented:

> It is, of course, morally noble to be devoted to beauty and goodness and dreams of a better social order; but to say that beauty and goodness and dreams are products of a world of aimless and purposeless matter is not intellectually enlightening.[248]

Theistic personalism and process theology proceed, I think justifiably, on the basis that life has intrinsic value. Human beings make choices between possibilities, sometimes wisely, and sometimes not. God is available as a source of lure toward what is good. Whether through prayer, meditation, contemplation, inspiration, community

[247] Stephen Unwin, *The Probability of God* (New York: Crown Forum, 2003), 104.
[248] Brightman, *Is God a Person?*, 24.

worship, or other means, there are grounds for hope that we may in the future better tune in to God's persuasion.

The personalist and process theologians discussed in the paper support their theism based on reason and experience. Arguments they make based on reason do not prove God's existence, but do provide reasonable grounds for belief in God and a theistic hope over a materialistic view. Human experiences of the non-material aspects of our world also argue for, but do not prove God. Bowne, one of the strongest critics of materialism, invoked such experiences in his book *Personalism*:

> This is not a machine and dead world, but a world of life and personality and morals and religion; and in such a world it is permitted to see visions and dream, to form ideals and live in their inspiration, and to venture beyond knowledge in obedience to those 'high instincts' which have always been, and still remain, the 'fountain light' of all our spiritual day.[249]

Brightman wrote in 1945 that "by choosing to despair, man can block progress; by wise action, he can contribute to it."[250] We will need wise action to prevail over despair. God also, Brightman held, will not lose hope in us: "Through all man's agonies and sins and despairs, God will never abandon hope for humanity and will never refuse his aid."[251]

There are adequate grounds in reason and experience to have hope, albeit conditional or uncertain, in God and human potential. There are ideas from personalism, process thought, and humanism which can serve as pathways to constructing a natural theology embracing that hope.

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[249] Bowne, *Personalism*, 302.
[250] Brightman, *Nature*, 82.
[251] Ibid., 152.

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