

The God of Metaphysics

Being a Study of the Metaphysics
and Religious Doctrines of Spinoza,
Hegel, Kierkegaard, T. H. Green,
Bernard Bosanquet, Josiah Royce,
A. N. Whitehead, Charles Hartshorne,
and Concluding with a Defence of
Pantheistic Idealism

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Chapter 1

Introductory

I Metaphysical Religion and its Critics

The philosophers discussed in this book (apart from Kierkegaard) each thought that they could establish, by metaphysical argument, the existence and something of the character of an (in some sense) *infinite* individual, suitably called either 'God' or 'the Absolute' or both, and whom or which they thought a suitable focus for some kind of religious emotion. Such an attempt to support a religious view of the world on the basis of metaphysical arguments has been much criticized by such thinkers as Pascal, Søren Kierkegaard, William James, John Macmurray, and others. The main purpose of this book is to consider how far the work of certain thinkers who produced metaphysical systems in which God or the Absolute figures fall foul of this criticism. However, it is not so much the relation of their metaphysics to *Christianity* (even though that was the main concern of the critics mentioned, James excepted) which is my concern as their relation to any form of *religious belief*.¹

It was Pascal who most notoriously criticized the God of the philosophers for his (or its?) irrelevance to religion. He was thinking primarily of Descartes and said:

The God of Christians does not consist of a God who is simply the author of mathematical truths and the order of the elements: that is the job of the pagans and Epicureans. He does not consist simply of a God who exerts his providence over the lives and property of people in order to grant a happy span of years to those who worship him: that is the allocation of the Jews. But the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, the God of the Christians is a God of love and consolation; he is a God who fills the souls and hearts of those he possesses; he is a God who makes them inwardly aware of their wretchedness and his infinite mercy, who unites with them in the depths of their soul, who makes them incapable of any other end but himself. (PENSÉES, 172)

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Around two centuries later, Søren Kierkegaard similarly contrasted the God of Christian faith with the God of the philosophers: in particular, that of Hegel and some of his Danish followers. The latter at best provides a solution to a purely abstract problem, whereas the former is discovered as the only adequate resolution of the problems of personal life.

William James was another who thought that philosophical (and theological) argument could not be the origin of any significant religious belief. At best it could provide some logical clarification of knowledge or belief gained from religious experience.

All these intellectual operations [of theology and philosophy] presuppose immediate [religious] experience as their subject matter. They are interpretative and inductive operations, operations after the fact, consequent upon religious feeling, not coordinate with it, not independent of what it ascertains.

The intellectualism in religion which I wish to discredit pretends to be something altogether different from this. It assumes to construct religious objects out of the resources of logical reason alone, or of logical reason drawing rigorous inference from non-subjective facts. It calls its conclusions dogmatic theology, or philosophy of the absolute, as the case may be. (VRE, 433)

But its conclusions are largely meaningless except as edifying verbiage. John Macmurray explained Kierkegaard's position well, as follows:

The Danish eccentric, Kierkegaard, discovered that the Hegelian philosophy was ludicrously incapable of solving—even, indeed, of formulating, the problem of 'the existing individual'. If we apply the Hegelian logic to the data of personal reality, we produce, he showed, 'a dialectic without a synthesis'; for the process of the personal life generates a tension of opposites which can be resolved, not by reconciliation but only by a choice between them, and for this choice no rational ground can be discovered. He concluded that we must abandon philosophy for religion. (THE SELF, 36)

And on his own account Macmurray insisted that a God whose existence is supposed to be proved by reasoning has little real religious significance. Thus he maintained that

the traditional proofs [of God's existence], even if they were logically unassailable, could only conclude to some infinite or absolute being which lacks any quality deserving of reverence or worship. The God of the traditional proofs is not the God of religion.

Particular targets of such criticism have been certain post-Hegelian absolute idealists who claimed to have arrived rationally at the existence of the Absolute, which many of them identified with God. Such a supposed reality contrasts sadly, it is said, with the living God of Judaeo-Christianity.

Edward Caird, for example, in his *The Evolution of Religion*, where he described God as ‘a principle of unity in the whole, akin to that which gives unity to our own existence as self-conscious beings’ (EVOLUTION, 33) is said to have made religious faith into a matter of mere intellectual assent to a philosophical theory.

More seriously objectionable still is said to be ‘Caird’s tendency to leave out of his primary definitions of God everything that makes God lovable, adorable, worthy of being worshipped.’ (SELL, 114–15)²

As against such objections this book will take up the cudgels on behalf of the God of some philosophers who elaborated metaphysical systems in which what they called either ‘God’ or ‘the Absolute’ played an intellectually essential role. I shall consider their reasons for claiming that God or the Absolute exists and possesses certain attributes, and then consider whether the existence of such a Being is, or would be, of any relevance to the theism which is central to most of the world religions, and, if not, whether it would be religiously significant in some other way. It is not to be expected that the answer will be the same with each philosopher; but in some cases, at least, I shall claim, not only that the reasonings of the philosophers deserve to be taken seriously, but that the God or Absolute whose existence they purport to establish is, or would be, a Being who mattered religiously (though not necessarily in the Judaeo-Christian or Muslim way).

Whether the God of one philosopher is the same individual as the God of some other philosopher, or of some theology, or some sacred book or other form of revelation, is a tricky question for the theory of identity. If God does not exist in any relevant sense, then the question whether it is the same not really existing God who is postulated by various different thinkers or a different God is like the question as to whether Poseidon was really the same person as Neptune, which, since neither of these expressions names a real individual, can only concern the likeness of two concepts (a Greek and a Roman one), which will be a matter of degree. But if there is a single, genuine God, the question should have a precise answer.

One aspect of Pascal’s critique of the God of the philosophers, is that the philosophers, by the very fact of putting forward such a demonstration, show themselves quite alienated from the proper Christian recognition of the febleness of human reasoning.

We desire truth, but find in ourselves nothing but uncertainty. We seek happiness, but find only wretchedness and death. We are incapable of not desiring truth and happiness and incapable of either certainty or happiness. We have been left with this desire as much as a punishment as to make us feel how far we have fallen. (PENSÉES, 199)

And Pascal himself sees our desire for certainty and happiness as showing that the human race has fallen from a perfection it still longs for but lacks.³

We shall see that our metaphysicians, especially Spinoza and Hegel, are as opposed to this point of view as could be. Each thinks he can rationally establish his view of things as an absolute certainty. Moreover, while claiming to be theists (or at least believers in the Absolute) and some of them even Christians, they object to the kind of theistic ethic, represented by Pascal and Kierkegaard, according to which men must forswear all hope of happiness in this world as a quite unjustified pessimistic block on human development.

II Descartes

The philosopher whom Pascal was particularly objecting to was Descartes. For Descartes offers a (supposed) proof, or rather proofs, of God's existence in the course of finding a solution to the problem of scepticism and for the source of mathematical and scientific truth. Not that there is any reason to doubt (though it has been doubted) that Descartes seriously believed in God and was a genuine Christian. But for Pascal this was not a proper context in which to argue for God's existence; in fact, it was hardly proper to argue for God's existence at all.

Let us briefly consider what Descartes's arguments were for God's existence. A brief summary of what is most relevant for our purposes in his *Meditations* should suffice for our purposes.

1. I currently think of myself as knowing many things without any adequate investigation of whether I have good reason to believe them.
2. I shall temporarily discard all beliefs which are open to any possible doubt and not re-adopt them as cases of knowledge until I find good reason so to do.
3. I therefore temporarily discard all my beliefs about the existence and character of a real physical world in which I exist as a conscious being. For I can conceive the possibility that it is all an illusion.
4. However, I cannot discard my belief in my own existence as a conscious individual mind with certain thoughts. The very fact that I am doubting so much proves that I exist as a thinking being who has certain ideas (whether these ideas are true or not).

5. Among the ideas which I find within myself is the idea of a perfect being (which I call 'God') who created whatever exists, including myself (and apart from God himself, who exists necessarily).
6. But the idea of this perfect being, which I find in my mind, could not have been caused by anything other than an actually existing perfect being. Nothing else could have caused such a magnificent idea.
7. So God exists. What is more, there is an additional reason for believing in his existence: namely, that just as I cannot separate the idea of a valley from that of a mountain, so I cannot separate the idea of this perfect being from the idea of his actually and necessarily existing.
8. But, granted that God exists, he would not have given me the power to think if I could not use it to discover various truths about the world. If I make mistakes, it must be my own fault, because I have not thought hard enough, thereby misusing my free will.
9. Therefore I can trust my senses and my intellect whenever it would be my own fault if they mislead me. So my belief that I have certain sense experiences caused by a real physical world such as they seem to portray must be true.
10. But I am not merely returning to my starting-point, for my practice of methodical doubt has revealed two things.
 - (a) The absolute certainty of God's existence.
 - (b) That my mind is a distinct reality or substance from my body. For when I was doubting all I could, I could not doubt my existence as a thinking mind. But if I can doubt the existence of my body and not doubt the existence of my mind, they must be quite distinct things.
11. I know that other people are conscious, because the thoughts expressed in their speech can only be explained as coming from a genuinely conscious mind. But I have no reason to believe that animals are conscious, since their behaviour is in principle explicable mechanically. This is shown by the fact that they cannot speak.

There are of course other philosophical arguments for God's existence, besides those to which Descartes appealed, and the ones which I find most interesting were developed after his time. Particularly interesting in relation to the claim, common to Pascal, Kierkegaard, William James, and John Macmurray, that a God whose existence is supposed to be proved philosophically must be religiously irrelevant are those promoted by independent metaphysicians rather than by religious apologists. At any rate, it is the purpose of this book to investigate several metaphysical systems in

which the existence of God, or something pretty like him, emerges as an essential part of the general account of reality which they present, and to ask whether such a God is 'religiously available'.⁴

Pascal and Kierkegaard were of course concerned with the relevance of a philosopher's God to the God of Christianity as they conceived him. However, my enquiry will be broader than that, inasmuch as I shall be asking whether the God of each metaphysical system is religiously relevant at all, whether in a Christian context or otherwise.

The metaphysicians whom I shall study most thoroughly in relation to this question are Spinoza, Hegel, T. H. Green, Bernard Bosanquet, Josiah Royce, Whitehead, and Hartshorne. After the chapter on Hegel there is a chapter examining Kierkegaard's critique of the Hegelian approach to religion.

Although I am not considering any thinkers before the seventeenth century, it would certainly be important in a more thorough survey to include discussion of some earlier thinkers, more especially Plato and the Stoics. But there are several reasons for not going earlier than Spinoza—a sufficient one is that I doubt that I have much of interest to say about any previous thinkers, and that if I wrote on them, it would be only as a copyist of the work of other commentators. As for the great theologians of the Middle Ages, I must emphasize that my interest is in thinkers who cannot be described as Christian apologists, or indeed as apologists on behalf of any standard religion.

My exposition and discussion of the work of my chosen metaphysicians, I might add, does not confine itself to their explicit dealing with religious issues. I shall consider their systems in the round, both because this is worth doing in itself and because it is the religious implications of their systems as a whole which are in question, not isolated claims about God. In fact, so far as can be done in single but long chapters I aim to provide a commentary on these metaphysical systems which should be of interest to anyone concerned with metaphysical issues, whether for the implications for religion or otherwise.

III The Meaning of 'God' and the Idea of the Absolute

But what does the word 'God' mean? The traditional Judaeo-Christian and, I think, Muslim idea of God is as the uniquely almighty, all-good, and all-knowing creator of the universe. But I shall take the expression more broadly than that.

Roughly put, I shall regard as 'God' anything which a metaphysician in a not unreasonable way refers to by this word. But I shall also allow the expression for something which (even if they do not call it 'God') plays a role in their thought, feeling, and life significantly akin to what God does for others.

A word is in order here as to the relation between the word 'God' and the expression 'the Absolute' (Bernard Bosanquet and Josiah Royce) and 'the Eternal Consciousness' (T. H. Green) on the part of the three Anglo-American absolute idealists to whom chapters are devoted. I reserve my comments on Hegel himself till my chapter on him.

For Green *the Eternal Consciousness* was properly called 'God', though clearly his conception of God differs from that of standard Christianity. The basic difference is that each of us is in some sense identical with God, or the Eternal Consciousness; that is, *the Eternal Consciousness* is somehow operating through us in all that we do. Royce likewise identifies God and the Absolute. But for him we are each *part of God* in a sense which Christian orthodoxy would deny. Still, in the case of both Green and Royce, their God is expected to play a part in our religious life not very different from that which he plays in Christian orthodoxy.

The case of Bosanquet is somewhat different. For him, as for F. H. Bradley, it is inappropriate to call the Absolute 'God', and they may well be right in this. Bosanquet in fact seldom speaks of anything which he calls 'God'. So far as he has a use for the word at all, it is to refer to the main forces of good acting within the Absolute, rather than the Absolute itself, the latter being more the scene for the struggle between good and evil than good itself. None the less, it is the Absolute which plays the role in his thought and feeling most similar to that of God for others. For it is the perfection ascribed to the Absolute which is foundational to his sense that in the last resort all is well with the world. He did, indeed, once say that neither Bradley nor he thought of worshipping the Absolute; but it is clear that he thinks it an eternal reality whose perfection gives point to the world. So I think it appropriate to consider each of these absolute idealists as presenting something suitably called a philosophical version of theism, and therefore as each a target for all those who think that a 'philosophical God' is bound, whatever is claimed for such, to be in the end a religious dead end.

We might be more precise if we accepted the following use of the expression 'God'⁵ and say that something is appropriately called 'God' if and only if he, she, or it (a) satisfies (or is believed to satisfy) at least one of the fourteen conditions below (understood in some not too far-fetched sense) and (b) satisfies more of them than does anything else:

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1. is creator of the universe (the totality of everything not himself, herself, or itself);
2. is uniquely all-knowing;
3. is uniquely all-experiencing (that is, feels the experiences of all beings);
4. is either uniquely real or real to a degree which nothing else is;
5. exists with a unique kind of necessity;
6. is omni-present;
7. is the explanation for the existence of everything else;
8. is uniquely all-powerful;
9. is morally perfect to a degree which nothing else is;
10. is uniquely perfect in some possibly non-moral sense;
11. is the one proper object of worship;
12. is the one proper object towards which certain specifically religious emotions should be felt;
13. is the one thing through appropriate relation to which a human being can be 'saved';
14. is an all-knowing and, so far as he or she wants to be, all-controlling person.

I suggest that Green's eternal consciousness answers at least to (2)–(4), (11), (12), and perhaps (13); that Bosanquet's Absolute answers at least to conditions (2)–(7), and perhaps (12); and that Royce's God answers to at least (2)–(4), (7)–(10), and perhaps to (11) and (12). Moreover, for each philosopher there is nothing which satisfies more of them.

I ask the reader at this point to note that henceforth in this book pronouns referring back to 'God' will mostly be grammatically masculine. Most of the philosophers discussed in the book think of God neither as father-like nor as mother-like, but 'he or she' might suggest that God was both, and 'it' could be misleading in another way (while 'she' alone looks as though a point is being made). I shall also occasionally capitalize 'He' with reference to God, partly for clarity. Incidentally, in speaking of an indefinite person, I shall use 'he' rather than 'he or she' in order not to make my prose more tortuous than it has to be, while alternative uses of 'he' and 'she' would be unhelpfully distracting in a book of this kind.

IV What Religion Is and what it may Do for Us

One way of asking how far these metaphysical systems ground a genuinely religious outlook is to consider what it is that religion, or religion at its best, is said to have done for people. One can then consider whether these

metaphysical systems have this value. There are, of course, two distinct questions: (1) Do they lend support to any kind of genuinely religious outlook at all? (2) Do they lend support to any form of Christianity, this being the religion to which Pascal and Kierkegaard thought that they were irrelevant? However, both these questions concern me in this study, though more the first, than the second.

Perhaps I should start by offering a definition of religion. As is often pointed out, a religion need not be theistic in character, since no one denies that Buddhism is a religion. John Stuart Mill, among others, has argued that a religion of humanity for which 'a sense of unity with mankind and a deep feeling for the general good, may be cultivated into a sentiment and a principle capable of fulfilling every important function of religion and [is] justly entitled to the name' (MILL, 110 ff.).

Taking all such things into account, I suggest initially that religion is best understood as 'a truth to live by' typically satisfying the following conditions. (In this phrase 'truth' means 'something believed to be a truth'.) This may be made more precise by saying that a religion properly so called must meet the following four conditions. It must be:

1. A belief system, held to be true by its adherents, which affects the whole way in which those who seriously believe in it live their lives.
2. A belief system intrinsically associated with emotions which can be called 'religious'. (It is hard to say precisely which emotions count as such. However, they must be in some way 'cosmic': that is, directed at the nature of things in general, envisaged somehow as forming a spiritual whole not exhaustively describable in terms of purely empirical or scientific terms.)
3. A system of moral precepts which the belief system and the cosmic emotion encourage and help people to live by.
4. Furthermore, a life suffused by these beliefs, emotions, and moral precepts must offer some kind of salvation, whether this be expressed secularly as happiness of an enduring kind, or as some general sense of well-being—or some reward in terms of happiness in the life to come. More generally, it offers a way of being saved from something bad, whether this be despair or sin or whatever.

This list of conditions for what a religion is will seem inadequate to some who belong to an organized religion.

5. Some would hold that a religion must, in addition to the foregoing, be held in common by a larger or smaller number of people, normally with

some ceremonies expressive of their beliefs and feelings, or even for its supposed supernatural effects. In short, some people think that the only real religions are community religions.

In the light of this I suggest that we call an outlook and practice a community religion only if it meets conditions (1)–(5), while we call a religion personal if it meets only the first four. Outlooks which arise from, or are closely associated with, a metaphysical system are likely to be personal religions. However, something may be called a personal religion if it operates as a special form or, as one might put it, a personal interpretation of a community religion with no independent community aspect of its own.

Thus there have been followers of Whitehead and Hartshorne who felt at home with Methodism, while conceiving God and other religious realities in terms of process philosophy. Bosanquet and Hartshorne each had some association with Unitarianism, as do I myself. Thus a religious outlook especially associated with process philosophy (the philosophy of Whitehead and Hartshorne and their followers) might be called a personal form of Christianity, or some denomination thereof. Moreover, perhaps each of the metaphysical systems could enter into some kind of synthesis with commitment to a particular faith community, more especially a Christian church. But our concern here is primarily with the religious implications of these metaphysical systems as possible personal religions, as they stand. A personal religion may of course have many adherents, but inasmuch as it has no organizational aspect, it counts as a personal religion. (Spinozism, I shall claim, is a personal religion for an unknown number of persons.)

To this I add a sixth condition which must be satisfied by a religion, community or personal, if it is to be a good one.

6. A religion is a *good* religion if and only if it promotes ethically desirable behaviour. This does not require that the belief system be true. (So far as sheer logic goes, it could be true but bad, though whether a bad religion could really be true, I doubt.)

Thus a religion can be a good one without the belief system being true. And there is nothing inconsistent in an adherent to a religion thinking that other religions are less true, contain less of the truth than the adherent's religion, and may yet be good religions. This point is the essential basis for religious tolerance. Everyone has a right to their own religion, and can exercise that right provided there is some belief system of the relevant kind which they believe to be true. We should never judge

adversely someone whose belief system we think false. However, we are entitled to object to a religion which promotes bad behaviour. Society must do something to protect itself against the ill effects of such a religion.

Turning to the question of whether the God postulated in some metaphysical system is religiously relevant or not, we may now take this as the question of whether belief in this God could be an essential ingredient of a religion in the sense just indicated.

More generally, it is worth mentioning that some of the things which religion is thought to do for people are as follows:

1. provide an eternal object of love, which also provides a kind of ultimate safety;
2. give the encouraging news that ultimately the good is more powerful than the bad or evil;
3. provide a degree of comfort when the world looks bleak;
4. rid us of the sense of cosmic loneliness, which some feel;
5. promise (or threaten) a life after death, and perhaps reunion with one's loved ones;
6. promote ethically desirable behaviour, giving it a stronger motivation than a moral outlook abstracted from any system of beliefs about the world can do;
7. make moral demands upon us, not all of which are easy;
8. give practical guidance as to how to behave.

V Worship and Prayer

Worship and prayer are likely to be the things which a Pascal or a Kierkegaard finds most lacking in a religion based on metaphysics.

As a public act, prayer can hold as an element only in a community religion. But could a belief in God based upon metaphysical reasoning promote private prayer? If it means a period of fresh commitment to one's highest ideals, with the aid of feelings directed at God, however conceived, I see no reason why it should not be practised by someone whose personal religion derived much of its force for him from metaphysics. If it is petitionary prayer, asking for certain things to happen not within the individual's power in any ordinary way, I suspect that it would be rejected by the philosophical religionist as inappropriate. But if it was a similar commitment to one's own self-improvement, it might well be recommended and practised. It is also worth remembering the saying: 'Prayer changes people and people change things.'

Worship, again, is most naturally thought of as a public act on the part of a community. The whole concept of worship has been associated with the idea of God requiring it of us. It seems to many of us that a God who longs to be praised is not a very ethically compelling one. But if it is a way of opening oneself to a sense of the glory of God, however conceived, that is rather different.

VI The Religious Relevance of a Metaphysical God

So I now turn to our metaphysicians to decide, in the light of the three numbered lists above, how far the God they postulate is religiously relevant, and, more generally, whether their philosophy can play the part of a religion for one who adopts it. However, I have found it impractical to apply these conditions one by one to each philosopher, so they will just lie in the background. Anyone who wishes may of course test my claims in relation to each philosopher by using these three lists. I shall also try to say a little as to how far these philosophers seem to have lived lives genuinely inspired by their philosophy, apart, that is, from in philosophical writing and discussion.

I should perhaps say here that I do not intend to offer a discussion of the standard arguments for God's existence. The main traditional ones are:

1. The First Mover argument. Things cannot move unless set in motion. Therefore, there must have been something which set them in motion without itself needing to be set in motion. And this is what we call God.
2. The First Cause argument. There must be a first cause of anything occurring or existing at all. And this we call God.
3. The Cosmological Argument. The ordinary natural world being something which might not have existed, but which does exist, must have been brought into existence by something that did not need to be brought into existence because it eternally existed of necessity. And this we call God.
4. The Perfection Argument. Things are of various degrees of perfection. But there must be something which sets the standard for degrees of perfection, and this being must be perfect. And this we call God.
5. The Teleological Argument. Many or all things in the world have a purpose or function. Therefore they must have been made by something which made them for that purpose. And this we call God.

These are the five proofs of God's existence promoted by St Thomas Aquinas (somewhat adapted), none of which has enjoyed a very good press in recent times, though all except the first still have defenders.

It was a version of the fifth argument, commonly called the Argument from Design which for a long time held the field as the most persuasive. It seemed so obvious that an enormous number of things are there for a purpose, most obviously the various organs of human and animal bodies, which seem to be there to perform some specific function. Unless there is a designer, it is difficult to see how they could be so precisely suited for this purpose. And the only possible designer seems to be a rational being who created the world, in short, God.

This argument as it used to be mainly understood (most famously by William Paley) suffers from Darwin's evolutionary explanation of design in living nature as occurring through natural selection, almost universally accepted in the educated world (though not by American Christian fundamentalists).⁶ However, there are versions of it in the form of the 'anthropic principle' that the universe appears to have been geared, from the Big Bang on, as eventually propitious for the emergence of life, even intelligent life. (See, for example, BARROW AND TIPLER.) Important as this issue is, I shall not concern myself with it here.

To these six arguments must be added the 'Ontological Argument' first formulated by St Anselm (1033–1109), archbishop of Canterbury, and less effectively advanced again by Descartes among others. According to this argument (which Aquinas rejected), an adequate understanding of the meaning of the word 'God' (or equivalent expression), as the serious believer in God uses it, is enough to show that God must necessarily exist. Otherwise put, the proposition that God does not exist is self-contradictory. There are a number of variants upon this argument. When first heard, it is liable to sound ridiculous, but properly reflected on, it is arguably the most forceful. This argument will be examined quite thoroughly in the chapters on Spinoza and on Whitehead and Hartshorne.

Finally, there is what I myself think the best argument: namely, the idealist argument (or rather a set of slightly different idealist arguments). These turn on the claim that the idea of anything existing without being experienced, however obviously *coherent* and even *true* it seems at first sight, is, in fact, evidently *false*. The only satisfactory way of explaining why things evidently do exist even when *not experienced by any finite being* is to postulate an *infinite being who experiences them*, and granted that it experiences what we finite beings do not, it is reasonable to infer that it also experiences what we do experience. This infinite being is God.

This argument is put forward only vaguely here, as a gesture in the relevant direction. It certainly is not a complete argument as it stands (even apart from the fact that a good deal of effort must be expended to support the claim that nothing exists unexperienced). But some argument of this sort will figure largely in our discussion of Green, Bosanquet, and Royce, and to some extent of Whitehead and Hartshorne, and then finally in my own positive position. Spinoza's case is somewhat different.

The main argument *against* the existence of God is that there is so much evil which God, conceived of as both omnipotent and all-good, would have prevented if he existed, from which it follows that he does not exist. This will receive a good deal of discussion in what follows.

It seems to me that the position of each of the metaphysicians discussed in this book (not Kierkegaard, whom I do not count as a metaphysician) is capable of providing an individual, who thinks it largely true, with a personal religion which may further serve him, if such is his wish or need, as a personal interpretation of some liberal form of community religion. However, it has seemed rather unnecessarily laborious explicitly to check out how the God or Absolute of each philosopher (and the general tone of their metaphysics) relates to the criteria set out here. But it should be clear enough how they do, at least on my account of them.

VII Texts

Most of the philosophers studied here wrote in English. However, three of them did not: Spinoza wrote in Latin, Hegel in German, and Kierkegaard in Danish. In the case of Spinoza's Latin I know enough of the language to take some account of his original text, but I have mostly relied on English translations. As regards Hegel, I do know some German, but I would not trust myself to be sure of understanding him in his own language, so here again I have mostly relied on translations; I have also made substantial use of commentaries (in English) on his so deeply problematic work, as is not true with the other thinkers studied here, though of course I have not ignored what others have said about them. As regards Kierkegaard, I know no Danish at all, so my study of him is based entirely on translations, with an occasional question to an expert. Since that is my own basis, I have included only English-language books in my bibliography.

Some of those with appropriate skills (or perhaps some Germans or Danes) will approach my work with the thought that Hegel and Kierkegaard, can never be understood by reading them only in English. To this I

say that reading them in the original would certainly be better. But we all approach philosophical writings with different skills, and I hope that I have sufficient philosophical skills to compensate somewhat. I have even received some praise for my clarification of the work of some philosophers whom I approached almost wholly through translations.

On another point I should remark that in the case of each of these philosophers, more especially Hegel and Kierkegaard, there are experts whose main intellectual avocation has been the study of their work. But unless books which study a number of disparate philosophers are not to be written, the author (a few authors of outstanding learning excepted) of such a book is bound to be less expert on many of them than are those who specialize in understanding them. I can claim, at any rate, that my study of each of these thinkers has been quite long and earnest, and it is my hope that I have something worth saying about them. I hope too that most readers will actually learn something about the thinkers in the book about whom they know least. For they are all worth knowing about.

So in spite of the main purpose of this book, which is to insist on the religious relevance of many metaphysical systems, I hope that it may for some people be useful simply as a way of learning something new about thinkers on whose work they do not claim to be experts. There must be many, for example, who, while knowing the work of Hegel well, are not too familiar with the philosophers sometimes called the English or Anglo-American Hegelians.

I can say, at any rate, that for the most part I am stressing aspects of the thinkers which tend to be neglected today. This comes partly from the fact that many commentators of recent times attempt to make them more respectable (in their eyes and by their criteria) than they really are, and that my own views, currently (but I am confident not for ever) thought rather weird, may make me more willing to allow that these philosophers really meant what they said, not some sanitized version of it.

VIII Good and Bad Religion

In his book *Religion in the Making* A. N. Whitehead remarks that in seeking to understand the phenomenon of religion, we should do so without presupposing that religion is always a good thing. For him, as for me, some forms of religion are good, others bad. We are especially aware of this in the opening of the twenty-first century, when the most terrible deeds and irrational restrictions, and unwise responses thereto, are made

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in the name of religion, usually from what is called a fundamentalist perspective of extreme intolerance. Without wishing to play down the horrific forms which religion can take, I shall be concerned with more beneficent forms of religion.

So I now begin my investigation of our metaphysicians with Spinoza.

Notes

1. That most of the thinkers studied are idealists is not just a matter of my own interests. For it is difficult to think of any important metaphysician since the seventeenth century who elaborates a metaphysic with religious implications who was not an idealist, the exceptions being Spinoza and Whitehead (and these are only partial exceptions). Those with the best claim to be doing this today are too much Christian apologists for my purposes (the two Canadian philosophers Leslie Armour and John Leslie are the exceptions, and I have learnt quite a bit from their writings). Incidentally, I have not discussed Leibniz, because his religious outlook is much less of an option for us today, as I see it, than are the positions of the thinkers examined here.
2. On the matter of worship, Bosanquet said in a letter to C. C. J. Webb with reference to Bradley and himself, 'we do not think it possible to worship the Absolute. What is worshipped, at once must become less than the whole' (SELL, 119). But other absolute idealists, such as C. C. J. Webb and Henry Jones, held that the Absolute was God, and appropriately worshipped (ibid. 119). See also ibid. 123 and *passim* for other thinkers who have protested against any attempt to assimilate the God of religion to the Absolute of absolute idealists.
3. That we are thus fallen is not, however, something which can be proved, and can be known only by revelation to those who accept this by faith. Still, once possessed of this belief, one can recognize this human limitation as the product of the original fall of man (in the persons of Adam and Eve). (This remark is indebted to Susan James, *PASSIONS*, 238–9.)
4. I borrow this fine expression from *The Religious Availability of Whitehead's God*, by S. E. Ely.
5. This is taken from my article 'Pantheism', *The Monist*, 80/2 (April 1997), 191–217.
6. For an important critique of it, see DAWKINS.