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the evil which his decision inevitably involved'. Phillips and Price fear that if we deny this we must deny the reality of moral dilemmas. But the argument of this essay does not commit us to the view that 'The moral house can always be put in order' (as Phillips puts it on page 47 of his book). To reject a proffered description of a possibility is not to reject the possibility; and our present conclusion is quite consistent with the thought that 'very often there is no clear choice between good and evil'.

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PIKE'S OCKHAMISM

By JOHN MARTIN FISCHER

I

NELSON Pike has presented an argument which purports to establish the incompatibility of God's omniscience and human freedom ([6], [7]). Elsewhere, I have defended this sort of argument against a compatibilist strategy which I dub 'Ockhamism' ([2]; see also [1]). Recently, Pike has 'switched sides' to argue that my defence of the incompatibilist argument overlooks the force of the Ockhamist criticism of it ([8]). I intend here to set out one version of the incompatibilist argument and explain Pike's recent answer to it (on behalf of the Ockhamist). In another paper, I have argued that the Ockhamism recently suggested by Pike is unacceptable insofar as it renders God's existence unduly dependent on *human action* ([3]). In this paper, I shall supplement my criticism of Pike's approach by arguing that Pike's Ockhamism entails that God's existence is dependent, in an unsuitable way, on *God's own actions*. I believe that the two strands of criticism of Pike's defence of Ockhamism provide an entirely convincing refutation of it.

II

Let me begin by setting out one version of the argument for incompatibilism. I shall assume here, following Pike, that 'God' is a 'title-term' or 'role-indicator' — a non-rigid designator whose descriptive content specifies a certain position or role. Thus, to say that God exists is to say that there exists someone who fills the

role of God. In contrast, ‘Yahweh’ is taken to be a proper name. Further, I assume that among the essential properties of God are omniscience and eternity (here understood as ‘sempiternality’ or ‘everlastingness’). One can distinguish between two conceptions of God’s essential attributes. On one conception ‘God is essentially omniscient’ is interpreted as a *de dicto* attribution: necessarily, whoever fills the role of God is omniscient. On a contrasting conception the attribution of essential properties is *de re*: if Yahweh is God, omniscience is essential to the personal identity of Yahweh. The conception of God’s essential attributes which I shall adopt here is the *first* one (for discussions of the second conception, see [8] and [3]).

Crucial to the incompatibilist argument is the ‘fixed past constraint’ on power attributions:

- (FPC) It is never in any person’s power at a time T so to act that the past relative to T would have been different from what it actually was.

I shall now present the incompatibilist argument (I follow my presentation of the argument in [2] and [3]). Suppose that Jones does X at T₂ and that Yahweh is God. It follows from Yahweh’s omniscience and eternity that He believed at T₁ that Jones would do X at T₂. Now if Jones is free at T₂ to refrain from doing X, then:

- (1) It is within Jones’s power at T₂ so to act that Yahweh would have been God at T₁ and would have held a false belief at T₁, or
- (2) It is within Jones’s power at T₂ so to act that Yahweh would have been God but wouldn’t have held the belief He held at T₁, or
- (3a) It is within Jones’s power at T₂ so to act that Yahweh would not have existed at T₁, or
- (3b) It is within Jones’s power at T₂ so to act that Yahweh (though existing at T₁) would not have been God at T₁.

(1) is ruled out by God’s essential omniscience, and (2), (3a), and (3b) are ruled out by (FPC). If sound, the argument can be generalized to show that God’s existence is incompatible with human freedom to do otherwise.

The Ockhamist wishes to resist the argument by pointing out that (FPC) applies only to a sub-class of facts. There does seem to be a distinction, even if we cannot formulate it precisely, between hard and soft facts about times. A hard fact about a time is a ‘genuine’, non-relational fact; a soft fact about a time is ‘relational’ – it is not only about the time, but also about another time or times. Both the incompatibilist and the Ockhamist agree that there is such a distinction. Further, both agree that (FPC) applies to all hard facts about past times; that is, both agree that one cannot act

in such a way that a *hard* fact – a non-relational fact – about some past time wouldn't have been a fact. And whereas the hard facts about the past are, in this sense, fixed, both parties to the debate agree that some (though not all) soft facts about the past are not fixed (for examples of soft facts about the past which are, nevertheless, 'fixed', see [9], p. 165, and [4], pp. 432-3).

An Ockhamist, then, may wish to block the incompatibilist's argument by employing the hard/soft fact distinction to defend (2), (3a), or (3b). The Ockhamist is a compatibilist – he believes that it is possible that both 'God exists' and 'Humans are free' be true. In 'Freedom and Foreknowledge', I offered an argument that Yahweh's belief at T1 should be construed as a hard fact about T1, and thus that it is not open to the Ockhamist to defend (2) ([2], pp. 76-8). Pike does not dispute this point, and I shall take it as given, in this discussion. Also, on the *de dicto* interpretation of God's essential attributes, Pike provides no reason to doubt that the existence of Yahweh at T1 is a hard fact about T1, and so it doesn't seem to be open to the Ockhamist to defend (3a). But Pike correctly points out that I have offered no compelling reason to think that the fact that Yahweh fills the role of God at T1 is a hard fact about T1; thus, it might remain open to the Ockhamist to deny (3b). That is, Pike insists that it is open to the Ockhamist to say that a person can have it in his power so to act that the individual who actually is God *wouldn't* be (or have been) God.

III

I shall now develop an argument that if (FPC) does indeed rule out (2) – that is, *if* Yahweh's belief at T1 is a hard fact about T1 and (FPC) is true – then God's existence will be unacceptably dependent on *His own actions*. I shall argue that, relative to certain natural and plausible assumptions, the claim 'God exists', is *necessarily false*, insofar as it is admitted that God's prior belief is a fixed fact about the past. Thus, it will be seen that Pike's defence of Ockhamism is untenable.

I have already said that God is essentially eternal, i.e. that God is eternal in every possible world in which He exists. By this it is meant that, for every world *w* in which God exists and time *T*, 'God exists' is true at *T* in *w*. On the conception of 'God' adopted here, different individuals occupy the role of God in different logically possible worlds. Thus far I have also left it open that, although 'God exists' is true at each time in a given possible world *w*, there exist different persons who occupy the role of God at different times in *w*. But I shall adopt the assumption that, if a person fills the role of God in a possible world at time *T*, then that *same* individual occupies the role of God at all times in that world. So, whereas there are different individuals who are God in

different possible worlds, there are *not* different individuals occupying the role of God in the same possible world. This reasonable assumption rules out 'God-switching' in a possible world.

Also, I shall assume that God has the essential property of omnipotence. Of course, it is notoriously difficult to give an acceptable characterization of omnipotence. But for the purpose of this discussion it will not be necessary to produce such an account. I shall simply assume that, if an individual is omnipotent, then he can perform an act such as causing the Statue of Liberty to fall. That is, I shall take it that, on any adequate definition of omnipotence, it will follow that an omnipotent agent can cause the Statue of Liberty to fall.

It follows from the assumption that God has the property of essential omnipotence that if an individual (say, Yahweh) is God in this world, then He is omnipotent in this world. Further, it might be thought (and Pike has argued that it is so) that there are *certain* acts which Yahweh can do but are such that, if He were to do them, Yahweh would not occupy the role of God ([5]). So, even if Yahweh actually occupies the role of God, He *can* sin. (For instance, He has the power to torture an innocent baby.) Of course, if Yahweh is actually God (and thus, on any reasonable conception of God, perfectly good), we know that he *won't* sin; but nevertheless, He has the power to do so, and if He were to exercise this power, then He *wouldn't be* (or ever have been) God.

So there are certain acts which are such that, if Yahweh were to exercise his omnipotence and perform them, He wouldn't occupy the role of God. But I claim that our conception of God requires that there be at least certain acts (other than the one God actually performs) which are such that, if Yahweh were to perform them, He would still be God. That is, my claim is that a reasonable conception of God requires not just that the individual who occupies the role of God be omnipotent; it also requires that the individual who is God can *exercise* His omnipotence (by doing something other than what He actually does) *and* still be God. Whereas if Yahweh is God, Yahweh's doing other than what He actually does shouldn't *entail* that Yahweh is still God, it should at least *permit* it – I think that we should reject a conception of God according to which God's doing other than He actually does entails 'role-abdication'. Let us then accept the assumption that God is not 'essentially role-abdicating':

(NRA) For any time T, there is at least *one* action other than what the person who is God actually does which is such that, if He were to do it at T, He would still be God at T.

I shall now present an argument which mimics the incompatibilist argument set forth above and which shows that Pike's defence of Ockhamism is untenable: if God's belief is a fixed fact, then 'God

exists' is necessarily false, relative to the quite attractive assumptions about God developed above. Suppose that the Statue of Liberty does not fall at T2 and that God exists. It follows that Yahweh (being God) believed at T1 that it wouldn't fall at T2. If Yahweh has it in his power at T2 to cause the Statue of Liberty to fall at T2, then:

- (1') It is within Yahweh's power at T2 so to act that Yahweh would have been God at T1 and would have held a false belief at T1, or
- (2') It is within Yahweh's power at T2 so to act that He would have been God but wouldn't have held the belief He held at T1, or
- (3a') It is within Yahweh's power at T2 so to act that He would not have existed at T1, or
- (3b') It is within Yahweh's power at T2 so to act that Yahweh (though existing at T1) would not have been God at T1.

(1') is ruled out by God's essential omniscience. And (2') and (3a') are ruled out by (FPC); at least, for the purposes of this discussion, we shall assume this to be so. (Pike grants that Yahweh's belief at T1 is a hard fact about T1. And insofar as (FPC) applies to divine persons as well as human persons – as is eminently plausible – (2') must be ruled out. The only way to avoid this conclusion, given that Yahweh's belief is considered hard, is to say that Yahweh, being God, can affect *hard* facts about the past, in a way in which mere humans can't. But this position seems unacceptable. If a fact is genuinely a *hard* fact about the past, how can a temporal God now 'alter' it?) Thus, the only way in which we can allow Yahweh the freedom to cause the Statue of Liberty to fall at T2 would be to affirm (3b'). On this approach, if Yahweh were to cause the Statue of Liberty to fall at T2, then He would have had a false belief at T1 (the belief that it would not fall at T2) and thus wouldn't have been God at T1. (If omniscience were *essential* to the personal identity of Yahweh (contrary to the assumption adopted in this paper), then we obviously could not accept (3b'). I develop this sort of criticism, adopting the *de re* conception of God's essential attributes, in [3].) And in virtue of the assumption which rules out 'God-switching', if Yahweh were to cause the Statue of Liberty to fall at T2, then He would not be God at T2. But note that the argument is perfectly *general* – it applies no matter what action we pick. So it follows that, for *any* action X (other than the action which Yahweh actually performs), if He were to do X at T2, then He wouldn't be God at T2. But this violates (NRA), the assumption that the individual who is God is not essentially role-abdicating. If we accept (3b') in the case of causing the Statue of Liberty to fall, we must accept it for *any* action; but to do so would violate (NRA). Thus, (3b')

must be ruled out. And if so, it follows that Yahweh *can't* cause the Statue of Liberty to fall at T2, and thus is not omnipotent. But this clearly contradicts our assumption that God *is* omnipotent.

The argument presented above shows that, relative to the assumption that God's exercise of his freedom to do otherwise should not require role-abdication, it is necessarily false that any individual occupy the role of God, where the role includes essential eternity, omniscience, and omnipotence (interpreted as the properties are interpreted above) and where God's prior belief is taken to be fixed. The assumption (NRA) is surely plausible: whereas it is reasonable to assert that Yahweh wouldn't be God if He were to sin, it is not reasonable to assert that He wouldn't be God if He were to do *anything* other than what He actually does. While it might strain ordinary intuition to claim that it is *possible* that the individual who is God abdicate his role by doing other than what He actually does, it surely is unacceptable to claim that it is *necessary* that the individual who is God abdicate His role if he exercises His freedom to do otherwise. And if 'God exists' is necessarily false, then it follows trivially that God's existence is *not* compatible with human freedom, and Pike's Ockhamism is unacceptable.

IV

In this paper I have shown that, if one accepts (as Pike does) that God's prior belief is a fixed fact about the past, then the identity of God would depend inappropriately on God's *own* actions. This argument complements an argument which I present elsewhere that, on the approach to God's essential attributes adopted here (the *de dicto* approach), God's identity would depend unduly on human actions. Together, the two strands of argument lend considerable weight to the claim that, if God's prior belief is fixed, then Ockhamism is untenable, on the *de dicto* conception of God's essential attributes. In [3] I argue that, if God's prior belief is fixed, then Ockhamism is also untenable, on the *de re* conception of God's essential attributes. Thus, an Ockhamist will be forced to *deny* that God's prior belief is a *hard* fact about a past time; to do so, I believe that he must confront my argument that God's belief *is* a hard fact ([2]). If God's belief is a 'genuine', 'non-relational' fact, then Ockhamism must be rejected.¹

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EVIL AND THE EXISTENCE OF A FINITE GOD

By P. J. McGRATH

THE problem of evil is almost invariably presented as an objection to the claim that a divine being exists who is both omnipotent and infinitely good. The implication is that to escape the problem one need only alter one's conception of God by limiting his power or his goodness. J. L. Mackie makes this point explicitly:

It is plain, therefore that this problem can be easily solved if one gives up at least one of the propositions that constitute it. Someone who holds that there is in some sense a god, but one who is not wholly good, or, though powerful, not quite omnipotent, will not be embarrassed by this difficulty. (*The Miracle of Theism*, Oxford 1982, p. 151)

I believe that Mackie is wrong about this and that evil constitutes a problem for belief in even a scaled down version of the deity. To escape the difficulty one would need to reduce the power or the goodness of God to such a degree that he could no longer be properly called God or, at least, could no longer be regarded as a proper object of worship.

Consider first what happens to the problem when God is conceived as infinitely good but not omnipotent. Mackie's thinking is presumably that evil can now be explained by saying that while God does not want evil to be present in the universe, he does not have sufficient power to prevent it. But the trouble with this is that some evils which formerly existed have been eliminated by human ingenuity. For example, smallpox has been wiped out through the use of vaccination. If man can get rid of an evil like smallpox, why could God have not done likewise? To say that he was unable to do so is to reduce his power to such an extent that it