Berkeley's Theory of Radical Dependence

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INTRODUCTION

The Age of Reason: an Age of Transition

The life of George Berkeley (1685-1753) spans a period of dramatic transition in the culture of the Western civilisation, a transition which ushers in the Enlightenment and a decisive and seismic shift away from the remnants of the Medieval worldview. Berkeley was keenly aware of, and opposed to the anti-metaphysical spirit of these, the inaugural years of the Enlightenment, and saw clearly the direction in which contemporary thought was moving as we witness in his frequent expressions of dismay at the increasingly materialistic tendencies of the times and the waning of the Christian, or simply theistic, worldview. He was aware too of the decisive role of the new science as well as philosophy in the changes that were taking place. Berkeley was keenly aware that the Enlightenment spirit contained within it certain principles which, while not yet fully explicated, were antipathetic to the Christian worldview that had shaped Western thought, and was clearly motivated by a desire to shore up a theistic worldview against Europe's cultural slide towards deism and atheism.

While European thought in the first half of the eighteenth century could not be said to be overtly atheistic, Berkeley clearly observed the incompatibility of the Age of Reason with the Christian conception of the relationship between God and the world. What rationalism sought was a God who worked within the constraints of man's intelligence: a God to whom all men of differing creeds could subscribe in an age when consensus on theological matters was a rare commodity. While rational speculation about God was promoted by Berkeley, he, unlike deists such as Toland and Collins, does not dismiss the guidance of revelation in forming his philosophical conception of God. His philosophical speculation on God and his relationship with the world is deeply informed by the uniquely Christian notion of creation strictly understood as a free divine action (a necessary creation being incompatible with a transcendent God) in which the world in its totality is produced (thereby being utterly dependent on God). Berkeley also adheres to the traditional Christian conception of the provident and benign relationship of the creator to the created, and to man in particular. Repeatedly, as we shall see, Berkeley

attempts to bring these truths of revelation within the ambit of reason. He tries to show how the doctrines of creation and providence do not belong only within the realm of faith but can also be known by reason unaided by faith. This is not to say that Berkeley was a rationalist: he never attempts to reduce revelation to what is only humanly knowable and in his theological writings never tries to cast doubts on the mysteries of Christianity. On the contrary, Berkeley tends to make little of the difficulties reason encounters in examining theological questions, even going so far, as we shall see, to assert that knowledge of God's existence is more certain even than that of the world around us. While Berkeley defends, philosophically, the notions of creation and divine providence, the rationalists began by denying, explicitly or implicitly, both these doctrines. The first result of this rationalism in natural theology was the deistic denial of the utter dependence of the world on God, both for its existence and for its workings. Christian cosmology's assertion of the world's contingency was eclipsed in his era by the reappearance and growth of cosmologies asserting a self-sufficient universe. These are the cosmologies which either deify the universe (materialism) or reify God (pantheism); and both are incompatible with a Christian God. We will be examining these more closely later, in particular the cosmology of materialism which is of particular importance in the formation and evolution of Enlightenment atheism.

Berkeleian Scholarship

While Berkeleian scholarship has often adverted to the role played by the notion of radical dependence (of the entire world on the divine creative act) in all of Berkeley's thought, its critical importance tends to be overlooked. That Berkeley's philosophical writings combat the materialism of the age is generally acknowledged but rarely contextualised within the long tradition of Christian thought: theological, philosophical and even mystical, which is founded on a cosmology of a creation contingent on a transcendent Creator. As a result arguments of secondary importance, such as those concerning epistemology, are mistakenly prioritised, and even then only examined out of their proper context. At times Berkeley is studied insofar as he provides the link between Lockean empiricism and Humean skepticism. Even the renowned Berkeleian scholar A. A. Luce underestimates the centrality for Berkeley of the defence of Christian cosmology against deism. Marie B. Hungerman is one of those who does indeed recognise what underlies Berkeley's system of immaterialism:

> Perhaps Berkeley's basic motive is to clear the way for our acceptance of nature's dependence upon God. The Irish bishop's final view of nature is as the language of God addressed to the human mind. What Berkeley wishes above all is to insure our attention to nature precisely as a set of theistic signs leading men to recognize God and to participate in His providential plan.[1]

Indeed all of Berkeley's philosophical work centres on this desire to show that nothing in the natural world, whether it be sheer existence, order, change or any other of the multitude of phenomena found in the world, can be properly explained without recourse to the immediate activity of God. Science may explain sensible phenomena in terms of matter, gravity, or any of a number of such principles, but, for Berkeley, these must be taken as mere schematic representations of phenomena: matter, gravity, etc., are nothing in themselves.

As Stephen R. L. Clark observes in his summation of the role of religion in Berkeley's thought:

> There may still be critics who imagine that God only entered his philosophy to fill the gaps between one finite observer's perceptions and the next, or to save his episcopal reputation. The truth is that the works for which he is still chiefly known were written when he was a struggling research fellow at Trinity College, Dublin, but already deeply religious.[2]

Clarke, correctly in my view, observes that none of Berkeley's writings can be understood without bearing in mind that his motivation is the furtherance of the cause of religion and virtue.

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[1] Marie B. Hungerman, "Berkeley and Newtonian Natural Philosophy." PhD diss., Michigan, 1960, 254.

[2] Stephen R. L. Clark. 2005. "Berkeley on Religion." In *The Cambridge Companion to Berkeley*, ed. Kenneth P. Winkler, 369-404. New York: Cambridge University Press.

CHAPTER ONE

THE NOTION OF RADICAL DEPENDENCE

Some few, whose Lamp shone brighter, have been led
From Cause to Cause to Nature's secret head;
And found that one first principle must be;
But what, or who, that universal He.

Dryden, *Religio Laici*, 11. 13-16.

Introduction

We must examine the question of the dependence of the world on God by looking firstly at the whole question of creation. This is so because both creation and dependence are really different aspects of the one divine activity of causing contingent beings to exist. What explains the existence of the world at any moment given that the world has not the intrinsic power to exist? Mascall points out that "the existence of a world that is changing and contingent necessitates the existence of a God who is by his very essence changeless and necessary, upon whose creative fiat not merely the world's beginning but its continued existence depends."[3]

As a prelude to an examination of the centrality of the doctrine of "Radical Dependence" in the thought of George Berkeley we need from the outset to clarify exactly what is meant by Radical Dependence. At a later stage we shall see how this doctrine pervades Berkeley philosophical writings and must be interpreted as the motivation behind his work. For the moment Radical Dependence will be taken to mean the complete ontological dependence of the whole cosmos on the creative causality of God. It must be realised that though we experience this act as continuous, for it sustains creature through time, it is not to be thought that God renews this act at each successive moment. Were this so then the initial act of creation would not be the same act as that of conservation. God to be one

[3] E. L. Mascall, *He Who Is: A Study in Traditional Theism* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1966), 99.

must be identical with all his acts and so the act of creation is identically the act of conserving. God being unchanging is outside of time and so for him the act of creation-conservation is, as it were, instantaneous.

We will begin by examining the historical development from the Greeks onwards of the notion that the world constantly depends on God for its existence. This will be followed by an examination of the great change in thinking on the notion of creation under the influence of Christianity. It is with the Christian thinkers that we first find the notion of creation *ex nihilo* and, therefore, as we shall see, the first identification of creation and conservation, and it is within this tradition that Berkeley belongs.

We will see how the Platonic and Aristotelian cosmologies conceive of the universe as not completely dependent on God's creative action; primarily because the notions of God in these systems do not allow for a creation *ex nihilo* but only for a transformation of pre-existing matter. Subsequently we shall examine the neoplatonic system which mediates the creative causality of God through a "Chain of Being". Avicenna, as we shall see, is the first philosopher who, though not a Christian, realises that true creation and conservation are really one and the same divine act.

The two predominant views of creation have been termed "horizontalism" and "verticalism".[4] Horizontalism stresses the historicity of creation: the notion that the universe was created at a definite moment in time. Horizontalism tends towards deism in that it neglects God's present activity in the world. Thus the deistic position is that divine causality in the world ceased at a certain point in time, namely when the divine plan was written into the cosmos at the moment of creation.

In verticalism creation is not conceived of as a temporal act but rather as the continuous creative act of God. All causality is attributed directly to the divinity and secondary causality is denied. Verticalism tends towards occasionalism and mysticism. In contrast with the historical universe of the deists there is no duration of the universe in this worldview but rather a succession of re-creations at each instant. Creation is conceived of as being a necessary act of God and in this it conflicts with the freedom of God in Christian theism. We could divide the verticalists into three types: those, such as Spinoza and Hegel, for whom the world proceeds with a logical necessity from the existence of God, those, such as Plotinus, who assert that this necessity is a physical necessity and finally those, such as

[4] This terminology is taken from Gavin Ardley, "The Eternity of the World," *Philosophical Studies*, Dublin, no. 29 (1982-83): 33-67.

Leibniz, who assert that God, being able to do so, is morally bound to create the world.[5]

Platonic and Aristotelian Cosmology

Of course the Christian conception of creation did not arrive fully formed in the Greco-Roman culture of the first centuries after Christ; it entered into a world with its own clear cosmologies–with which it entered into dialogue and debate. The predecessor cosmologies–the Platonic, Aristotelian and neoplatonic schools of thought–are of importance for us to fully understand Berkeley, and in particular his final work *Siris*.

For Plato the world, or cosmos, has indeed *come into* being "for it is visible, tangible, and corporeal, and therefore perceptible by the senses, and, as we saw, sensible things are objects of opinion and sensation and therefore change and come into being".[6] However this coming into being is not comparable with the Christian (and Berkeleian) notion of creation, in fact not even remotely. The Platonic "creator" *demiurgos* is not a creator who brings the cosmos into existence out of nothing; rather the demiurgos, representing perhaps the intelligence of God, works on an imperfect and pre-existing material chaos, fashioning phenomena according to eternal archetypes. For Plato there is no creation from nothing–*ex nihilo*, but only the informing of a pre-existing matter by the Forms. Plato seeks to explain the existence of things by referring to the source of their form and intelligibility. He does not account for the existence of the chaos which acts as the receptacle of Forms. As Copleston points out:

> In the Platonic Physics, the chaotic element, that into which order is "introduced" by Reason, is not explained: doubtless Plato thought that it was inexplicable. It can neither be deduced nor has it been created out of nothing. It is simply there (a fact of experience), and that is all that we can say about it.[7]

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[5] I have taken this tripartite division from E. L. Mascall, *Christian Theology and Natural Science: Some Questions on their Relations* (London, 1956), 91-92.

[6] Plato, *The Timaeus* (London, 1965), 40.

[7] For a more in depth discussion on the role of the *demiurgos* in creation see Frederick Copleston's *History of Philosophy*, vol. 1 (London, 1954), 247-49.

Existence is to be explained in terms of an abstract property common to all existents, and in which each existent "participates". This is because Plato saw that

> the ultimate philosophical explanation for all that which is should ultimately rest, not within those elements of reality that are always being generated and therefore never really are, but with something which, because it has no generation, truly is, or exists.[8]

Though Berkeley, in his last work *Siris*, speaks of Plato as affirming the complete dependence of the world on God for its existence, this is not accurate. In affirming a substrate on which the *demiurgos* works but does not create, Plato is committed to a world depending on God for its form but not for its very existence.

Despite his reproof of Plato's notion of participation, Aristotle fails to come to a deeper appreciation of the problem of existence. Aristotle has no theory of creation as such; instead his theory of efficient causality accounts for how the world was set in motion and given form. We can see from his account of the ontological structure of beings that for Aristotle, as for Plato, form is primary. In place of creation *ex nihilo* we have an "eduction" or "drawing out" of forms from matter. Matter is eternal. The Unmoved Mover sets in act a series of moved movers which are responsible for this eduction of forms from matter. "In the universe of Aristotle, therefore, the production of being was essentially the work of motion."[9] Divinity, in such a system, is responsible for the being of things only insofar as it inaugurates movement. However, once again, the question of existence has not been adequately dealt with. For Aristotle, to *be* primarily means to be a substance (*ousia*), or that which makes a thing to be what it is. Form gives being to an existent and so, relative to matter, form is act. Being then is absorbed into essence. Matter is the principle of limitation, making a form to be the form of this particular individual rather than of any other. Matter becomes a co-eternal principle with the Unmoved Mover. Which then has priority in being? Are they both to be envisaged as autonomous beings, neither being dependent on the other for its existence? Even if this were Aristotle's position the fundamental metaphysical problem of the origin of contingent being would still remain unsolved. The existence of contingent beings–beings the essence of which is not to be *simpliciter* but rather to be in a particular way–requires that

[8] Etiénne Gilson, *God and Philosophy* (Yale, 1961), 42.
[9] Etiénne Gilson, *Elements of Christian Philosophy* (New York, 1960), 186.

there would exist a being, the source of contingent beings, which is being *per se*. Now there cannot be two such beings, the essence of which is to be, for they would have to differ by one having something the other lacked, and of course a being which lacks some aspect of being could not be being *per se*. Therefore if matter is the cause of its own being then it must be by nature and, as a consequence, there could be no other such being, i.e. there could be no God. Aristotle, not grasping that contingent being must depend on a being which is being by nature, has no real understanding of a notion of creation proper: "His metaphysics of being qua substance cannot account for being insofar as it is, for when being is viewed from the angle of substantiality its principal act, precisely in that order, is form and not *esse*.[10] Even if it is argued that Aristotle held act to be prior to potency, ontologically though not temporally so, can it still be maintained that this provides an explanation for existence *qua* existence? Turner holds that the logical conclusion of Aristotle's metaphysics is that of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*:

> The world, he [Aristotle] taught, is eternal; for matter, motion, and time are eternal. Yet the world is caused. But how, according to Aristotle, is the world caused? Brentano believes that Aristotle taught the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, and there can be no doubt that St. Augustine and St. Thomas saw no contradiction in maintaining that a being may be eternal and yet created. The most conservative critics must grant that while Aristotle does not maintain the origin of the world by creation, he teaches the priority of act with respect to potency, thus implying that since the first potency was caused, it must have been caused *ex nihilo*. His premises, if carried to their logical conclusion, would lead to the doctrine of creation.[11]

However it is meaningless to talk of prime matter existing from all eternity, whether existentially dependent on God or not, since for Aristotle, without form matter is nothing. It appears that prime matter is meant to occupy a position somewhere between being and non-being: pure potency to be. Is this no more than a device to allow being to be treated as a form with respect to matter, leaving matter outside the realm of being proper? Aristotle posits "prime matter" as the co-principle of existence (as *ousia*). But then what is matter; something that is nothing, a nothing that can do something? This conception of creation not only gives a dubious metaphysical status to matter, but is also insufficient to represent God:

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[10] Herve Thibault, *Creation and Metaphysics: a Genetic Approach to Existential Act* (The Hague, 1970), 11.
[11] William Turner, *History of Philosophy* (Boston, 1903), 143.

> Aristotle's notion of *ousia* is too much like a Platonic form to represent adequately the Transcendent Being. So long as being, in its primary instance, is conceived as that which is identically what it is, so long as essence or form is viewed absolutely as perfection, and not as limit as well, the range of metaphysics is restricted.[12]

Gilson succinctly argues case against Aristotle's universe being a created one, for "there still remains, in its beings, something which the God of Aristotle could not give them, because He Himself did not possess it [namely being]".[13] Aristotle's universe existed from all eternity and its God, contemplating himself alone, knows nothing of it. God is the Supreme Mover of the universe insofar as all things are eternally attracted to him but he neither created the universe nor does he exercise any providence over it.

Regarding Plato and Aristotle we can say that both, in failing to provide a solution for the problem of existence, i.e. a cause of existence as such, failed to provide any framework showing the radical dependence of the world on God. Both philosophers saw "created" beings as forms and so the cause of being itself was conceived as a form, but form signifies a limitation on being and as such does not provide an explanation for its own being nor of created beings since, as Parmenides saw, being of itself should be limitless. Forms can explain the existence of other forms but they cannot explain the existence of other beings. In this way neither Plato nor Aristotle developed any notion of the dependence of the world on God. For Plato God only conserves the forms of things but not the whole reality. Aristotle's God begins the process of motion but that completed he has nothing more to do with the production or conservation of the universe; God in this conception is the final cause and in this regard causes the becoming of the universe but not its being. Neither Plato nor Aristotle had a concept of God as creator as understood in a Christian sense:

> Plato and Aristotle, in different ways, situated necessity in the self-identity of pure forms: the necessary is the immutable or everlastingly self-identical .... Nevertheless, metaphysical reflection on the intentional thrust–the *intentio profundior*–of the systems of Plato and Aristotle suggests that unless ESSE subsist in itself (according to the intent of Platonism) or be

[12] S. Mansion, "Les positions maitresses d'Aristote," in *Aristote et saint Thomas d'Aquin*, ed. Paul Moraux (Louvain: Publications Universitaires, 1957): 66–67.
[13] Etiénne Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers* (Toronto, 1952), 71.

pure existential act (according to the intent of Aristotelianism), we shall never find existential necessity.[14]

Neoplatonic and Plotinian Cosmology

Philo (40BC-40AD) tried to harmonize the Old Testament with Greek philosophy. He is important in our examination of the notion of constant creation because, as a Jew, he held the world to be created by a free act of God. He tried to reconcile the Jewish portrayal of God as intimately concerned with and governing this world which He has freely made by an act of His will, with the doctrines of Middle Platonism which recognised a hierarchy of divine beings in which the world is ruled and formed by intermediary divine beings that are lower down the scale of being, whereas the Supreme Good or God is not in contact with this world. Philo opted for the compromise of intermediary powers.

In the system of Plotinus (205-270), creation is conceived of as an emanation of being from the One to the many.[15] The One is above all other beings and all things below the One, including the Forms, are only imperfect replicas the single Good. Through this notion of creation Plotinus breaks with the impoverished creator of the Greeks and their successors who, until the time of Plotinus, envisaged the creator as being at the head of a hierarchy of beings which differed in degree but not in kind from the rest of reality. Essentially the creator was some kind of primary "thing" dominating over all other things. Where Plato conceives of all the forms as contained in the archetypal Forms, Plotinus' creator completely transcends all substances. All that can be said of the creator is that he is One, transcending even being.

Plotinus designates this completely transcendent principle as the "One" because all individual things in a multiplicity require a source or a principle from which they spring. If a thing is not one it cannot exist, but rather two of more other things exist "in its place" as it were. Multiplicity presupposes unity: for there to be a multiplicity there must be a multiplicity of individuals. The multiplicity within the universe reveals a unity at its origin. Creation takes the form of an emanation from the One which "overflows" because of its goodness. In emanation Plotinus sees

[14] Thibault, *Creation and Metaphysics*, 20-21.

[15] Berkeley's later work is clearly under the influence of Plotinus. A copy of Plotinus' *Opera Philosophica* is listed in a catalogue of Berkeley's library. See R. I. Aaron, "A Catalogue of Berkeley's Library," *Mind* 51 (1932): 474.

two moments: the first in which the lower emanates as uninformed potentiality and the second in which it turns back to contemplate the higher and as a result receives form. In the second part of the process the higher reality is form, in the Aristotelian sense, and the lower is matter. In this way the dualism between the Aristotelian eternal co-principles of God and uncreated matter is overcome. In creation by emanation the totality of reality is dependent for its creation on the One. Using the analogy of emanation Plotinus managed to avoid "implicating" God in this world because God loses nothing through emanation (in the same way that one does not lose anything through being reflected in a mirror) and also because emanation is seen as a necessary process, stemming from the very nature of the One. Plotinus does not say that the One is unfree with respect to emanation for the One transcends even freedom. Rist, in his discussion of the necessity of Plotinian emanation, reduces the question to why the One is what it is: "If emanation follows from the One's nature and the One's nature is caused by the One's will, then emanation will be an act of free will and Plotinus will be freed from the shackles of a deterministic universe".[16]

Rist's point is that there could not be an extrinsic necessity acting on the One, but only an internal, logical necessity following on from the nature the One has, presumably freely, willed for itself. This would appear to amount to the One willing its own necessity, and with it willing the necessity of creation. Rist, however, overlooks the fact that Plotinian emanation, even interpreted in this way, is still not a free act and that Plotinus is committed to pantheism, for, even if the One is free to create its own nature (something which is evidently contradictory in itself), emanation still follows in a necessary way from the One thus constituted– the emanated world is still an outgrowth from the One. Had the One created a different nature for itself, then the world which would emanate from it (presuming that this was part of the alternative nature) would be different from the world that actually exists, but it would nevertheless still be an outgrowth from God. Similarly Plotinus is faced with the task of distancing the One from its effects, i.e. creation, while at the same time allowing that these effects still belong to the One and not to some other cause. Plotinus tries to preserve God's transcendence by distancing God from the act of creation; emanation alone can leave God untouched by creation. If creation were free God would have to step outside his self-

[16] See J. M. Rist, *Plotinus: The Road to Reality* (Cambridge, 1967), 76. See Chapter 6: Emanation and Necessity.

identity and decide at some point "in time" to create. But, as we have seen, the emanation model of creation, regardless of the interpretations given to it, cannot be separated from pantheism.

The first emanation from the One is that of Thought or Mind. Unlike the One whose knowledge is identical with itself, corresponding to the self-contemplation of Aristotle's Unmoved Mover, *Nous* contemplates the One and hence contains the duality of knower and known. *Nous* is the divine Mind that knows all things together instantaneously, and so holds the Forms of all individuals. Though *Nous* is identified with the *Demiurgos* of Plato, unlike the latter, it is to be identified with the Forms which are the archetypes of all individual things (a notion that was later to be handed on to the Christian philosophers and theologians). The Soul, corresponding to the World-Soul of Plato's *Timaeus*, in turn emanates from *Nous*. The World-Soul provides the link between the material and spiritual realms. The phenomenal world does not participate directly in the Forms in *Nous* but only through the mediation of the World-Soul. The World-Soul is divided into a lower and a higher soul, the former taking on the baser function of informing matter. Before the emanation of the material world individual human souls emanate from the World-Soul. These are bound together in the unity of the World-Soul and yet are immortal. Plotinus envisages the whole process of emanation as comparable with the radiation of light proceeding from its source at a central point and gradually merging with darkness furthest from the centre. In this penumbra we find the matter and form of Aristotle; the matter existing only insofar as it is in union with a form. Matter alone is the privation of light. United with some form it has the most tenuous of participations in the One. The Plotinian view of the universe is positive since the universe, as the image of the intelligible, the good, is also good. Plotinus, while holding matter to be the principle of all evil in that it is a privation, opposed the Gnostic thesis that the material universe is evil. Alone matter stands outside the emanation process and has no part of the One.

Plotinus' universe is radically dependent on the One as its source because the universe is essentially a living whole in which each of the lower levels is the product of a contemplation of higher levels. The whole chain depends on the One, not for an initial impulse, but for continuation in existence. This is a clear example of that view of creation which we have termed "verticalism" for the universe's radical dependence on "God" is achieved only with the loss of any real distinction between God and his creation. This universe is anything but the mechanical universe of seventeenth-century science: "The philosophy of Plotinus presents us with

a great ordered hierarchical structure of spiritual reality, a cosmos, which though it is static and eternal is no dead mechanical pattern, but living and organic."[17]

We shall see later how, in *Siris*, Berkeley adopts much of Plotinus' thought. Both men seem to share a distaste for the corporeal world and a love of the purely intelligible immaterial world. There may be another reason why the verticalism of Plotinus is so attractive to Berkeley. For Plotinus, God parcels out his own being to creatures and so, rather than creation *ex nihilo* there is a creative sharing out of himself; where Aristotle has a material substrate Plotinus has God's own being as the substrate out of which things are made. As a result there is only a difference of degree between God and the universe; the radical dependence in this case is no more than the radical dependence of God on God. In Christian theology this is the kind of dependence that operates between the Father and the Son in the Trinity since the Son is "begotten" of the Father from all eternity. Both are equal and the relationship is in no way a creation. The emanationists such as Plotinus conceive of the world as begotten of God. As we can see the world in the neoplatonic system is a living world, one governed by the divine realism and participating in the world of forms and through them in *Nous* and in God. This world is antithetical to that of the determinists who see all things as governed by fate: the mechanistic pre-destination of the world's destiny. In the Plotinian system the difference between all multiple beings and the One is one of degree for there is no essential difference between the Creator and his creation. This is unlike the orthodox Christian system in which God alone is. The Christian God is so transcendent of creation that no terms used to describe creatures can be applied to God in the same sense. The god of Plotinus is not the Christian God as he is "neither the supreme reality nor the ultimate principle of intelligibility".[18] However we must remember that while this is the logical outcome of Plotinus's emanationism it was by no means his intention to promote a pantheistic cosmology. Plotinus' very reason for asserting the necessity of creation was to preserve God from implication in a free decision to create and with it the notion of mutability. Plotinus always maintains, maybe with little justification, that in his system God transcends creation. Plotinus's influence looms large as an influence on Berkeley in *Siris*; his living universe and Chain of Being, as we shall see,

[17] A. H. Armstrong, *An Introduction to Ancient Philosophy* (London, 1957), 178.
[18] Gilson, *God and Philosophy*, 50.

is taken largely from Plotinus as an alternative to the mechanistic universe of the deists.

The system of Proclus (410-485), like that of Plotinus, refers all multiplicity to an underlying unity in the first principle, the *to auto hen*, of which we can only say what it is not, and from which there is an emanation of the *henads*, incomprehensible gods, the *Nous* of Plotinus and so on. In his *Elements of Theology* Proclus divides reality into a series that bridges the distance between the One and the many. The many have come from the One without prejudicing the transcendence of the One. The world is guided by the divine souls and as such cannot be seen as evil. In *Siris* Berkeley will introduce the same kind of mediation between creation and the creator. In conclusion we can summarise the neoplatonic position as follows: the God of the neoplatonists is compelled to create the universe, but although the universe is a necessary emanation from God, his transcendence is protected by placing a series of intermediary links between God and creation; ultimately then, God's action in the world is mediate.

The Cosmology of Avicenna and Averroes

The controversy between Avicenna (980-1037) and Averroes (1126-1198) brings the creation debate to a new level and develops a philosophical framework suitable for the Christian conception of radical dependence. Both thinkers clearly recognise the existential contingency of created realities and as a consequence distinguish between the essence of a thing and its existence, asserting that what a thing is cannot account for the fact that it is. This opens the way for the rejection of the Platonic position that something must merely participate in a Form, or as Aristotle maintains, be a form, in order to exist. Avicenna is the first to see clearly that the formal cause of a thing cannot be its efficient cause. As a result of this insight theories of radical dependence are free to move away from purely "essentialist" explanations of radical dependence which connote a sharing of form, towards an existentialist explanation of creation which, no less than the emanationist systems, allows for radical dependence while retaining the real distinction between God and his creation.

Avicenna has a much deeper understanding of the kind of causality involved in creation. He realises that creation involves a complete causality and is radically different from less complete examples of causality such as generation. Creation alone presupposes no material subject. Creation does not require temporality for its contingency is not temporal but essential. Avicenna distinguishes between the necessary

which cannot not be, and the possible, which can either be or not be, and thirdly the impossible, which cannot be. A nature, while being something that is not a contradiction and so is not impossible, is indifferent to being. Being is accidental to natures and consequently there must be an efficient cause of the being of a thing. There cannot be an infinite series of contingent efficient causes, for the contingency of this chain still implies the need for a cause outside it: a necessary Being that cannot receive its existence from another, but whose essence is identical with its existence. This is the ultimate Being which is necessary through itself. Avicenna is prepared to accept that the attribute of creator is identical with God but asserts that God cannot create something completely unlike himself, in this case matter, and so, like Plotinus, Avicenna turns to an intermediary chain of beings as a buffer between God and base creatures.

Avicenna uses the neoplatonic model of creation as an emanation from the One, through the mediation of Intelligences. As for the neoplatonists this is not a free, but rather a necessary emanation, and so is an eternal process rather than a creation in time as found in the Biblical account of creation. This leads him to the very important insight that creation *ex nihilo* does not imply that at one time there had to be nothing, but rather that creation concerns the ontological structure of created beings.

Avicenna was forced by his theory of cognitional emanation to maintain an eternal and necessary process of creation. For every possible must emanate in existence just as it is necessarily known by the Supreme Being. Accordingly, Avicenna transposed the theologian's consideration of the creature's passing from non-being to existence from the temporal order to the existential structure of things in themselves. The priority became one of nature and not of time.

Here, then, we find in Avicenna an ontological dependence of creatures upon God's knowledge of them. It is God's knowledge of their possibility which brings their emanation into actuality. Avicenna's system, unlike that of Plotinus, allows for a greater distinction between God and his creatures: creatures here are not just the divine nature manifesting itself in a lower form but rather distinct realities composed by God by adding an act of being to a possible essence. The problem here of course is that a possible essence is nothing if it does not exist. God in Avicenna's system is truly creative in that each substance is brought from nothing into existence; the accident of existence does not belong to the nature of any essence and so must be provided by the creator. However such a conception of creation does not result in a providential God because the existence once given to the substance has no further reference to God.

Averroes on the other hand was a thoroughgoing Aristotelian and, as such, for him, to be means to be a substance. He responds to Avicenna by pointing out that existence could not be accidental in things: there are no forms subsisting without existence as would be the case if being were a mere accident. Creation is the eduction of forms from the unproduced and eternal prime matter. We will see later how this distinction between essence and existence is taken up by Aquinas in his consideration of creation.

Christian Cosmology

The opening lines of Judeo-Christian sacred scripture unambiguously establish God as the creator of the universe, and significantly a creator in time: "God, at the beginning of time, created heaven and earth" (Gen.1:1). [19] Throughout the Judeo-Christian tradition the relationship between the world and God is firmly established: the world is radically dependent on God's creative and sustaining action. The *ex nihilo* character of creation is both implicit in the creation account and elsewhere explicitly asserted when the mother of the Maccabees beseeches one of her sons to "look round at heaven and earth, and all that they contain; bethink thee that all this, and mankind too, God made out of nothing" (2 Mac.7:28). This is the first explicit mention of the *ex nihilo* character to be found in Judeo-Christian writings.

God's self-subsistence is made quite explicit when God defines himself to Moses as "the God who is" (Exod.3:14). A world which is created by the Christian God will be both contingent and orderly. It will embody regularities and patterns, since its Maker is rational, but the particular regularities and patterns which it will embody cannot be predicted *a priori*, since he is free; they can be discovered only by examination.

Arguably Aristotle represents the culmination of Greek philosophical thinking on God, yet even here we find God portrayed as the aloof unmoved mover; a far cry from the personal God of the Old Testament, and, even more so, from the New:

> For the Christian, God is the single and only Absolute Reality. He is the fulness of Being (and therefore of Good, Truth, Beauty, Thought, and Life) who is in Himself everything that relative and derived, created beings are and infinitely more.... As against this Christian idea of a single

[19] All Biblical quotations are taken from the translation by Msgr Ronald Knox, London, 1954.

> transcendent Divine Being the pagan Platonists, as we have seen, believed in a Divine World, hierarchically ordered, with a number of eternal beings, all divine but differing in their degree of divinity, and all deriving from a transcendent First Principle.[20]

Christianity provided philosophers with a conception of creation which provides a rational explanation of the origin of things and posits an intellect at the root of reality (as we find so clearly in Avicenna). The paternal providentialism of the Christian conception of creation also provides a most comforting alternative to an existentially absurd universe which is a random product of chance. Even Thales, though he posits water as the *arche* of reality, saves the personal and providential dimension of reality by asserting, albeit cryptically, that "all things are full of gods". In the same way we can understand the disappointment of Socrates on discovering that the *nous* of Anaxagoras was not the personal *arche* he had so hoped for, but rather an impersonal principle of reality. With Aristotle's Unmoved Mover–pure intellect devoid of all desire–the Greeks lost the providential dimension of God's relationship with man. In the Genesis account of creation on the other hand, we are clearly presented with a supreme God who is at once the principle of all of reality, while remaining a person; in fact he is the person par excellence since man, with his personal interiority, is only an "image and likeness" of divine personal interiority. From the outset the distinction between God and his creation is clear: creation is not an emanation of God's being into lesser but still divine beings, but is a clear positing of being where before there was nothing. There is the one mind that has ordered all reality and so the one rule pervades the entire universe.

In the Old and New Testaments the providential concern of God for creation, and for man in particular, is continuously asserted. All creation is good and there is nothing that is rejected by God: "All things thou lovest, nor holdest any of thy creatures in abhorrence; hate and create thou couldst not, nor does aught abide save at thy will, whose summoning word holds them in being" (Wis.11:25-26). The cosmos is not a caprice of mercurial deities, nor the product of inexorable mechanical necessity, but is the free gift of a personal God. There is a single, benevolent plan pervading the whole of creation, from the macrocosm to the microcosm, a plan in which all, even apparent evil, conspires for the good. Cosmologies based on chance or necessity preclude all possibility of an intelligent and all-embracing scheme of things. In the Christian cosmology there is no

[20] Armstrong, *An Introduction to Ancient Philosophy*, 210.

necessity, nor are there seeds of chaos in matter since matter too has been created directly by God and is permeated with law. The providence of God stretches as far as his causality and so absolutely every being and every event in history belongs within the one plan of creation. Even the sparrows, epitomising insignificance, cannot "fall to the ground without your heavenly Father's will" (Matt.10:29-30). Divine providence has ordered all things to the glory of God and man, as the sole channel through which material creation can glorify God, occupies a particularly important position in this ordination. When Christianity came to be preached to the pantheistic Gentiles, it became all the more important to stress the unity and omnipotence of the Christian God, and so St Paul asserts that the existence of God can be proved from His creation:

> The knowledge of God is clear to their minds; God himself has made it clear to them; from the foundations of the world men have caught sight of his invisible nature, his eternal power and his divineness, as they are known through his creatures (Rom.1:20).

Standing in the Areopagus, St Paul tries to convince the Athenian intelligentsia that God "is not far from any one of us, it is in him that we live, and move, and have our being" (Acts 17:27-28). This phrase is repeated throughout almost all of Berkeley's works, forming a leitmotif which impresses on the mind of the reader the solidarity of Berkeley's theories with the Christian notion of providence.

Christian Neoplatonism

The Fathers and the Doctors of the early Church continued to affirm against the pagans that there was a God, against the Gnostics that this God was naturally knowable to all men, and against the Manichaens the goodness of God's creation. Though the Christian thinkers of the Patristic period and the Mediaeval era adapted neoplatonism to explain the Christian doctrine of creation, they never allowed for a role for intermediary demigods in the functioning of created reality, but maintained the robust monotheism of the Judeo-Christian revelation.

Clement of Rome (c.35-100), for example, presents God as personally involved in the world with no minions being sub-contracted to create, conserve or supervise creatures. Rather creation is directly imbued with divine providence:

> The heavens move at His direction and are subject to Him in tranquility. Day and night complete the course assigned by Him without hindering

> each other. Sun and moon and the choir of stars revolve in harmony according to His command in the orbits assigned to them, without swerving the slightest. His earth, flowering at His bidding in due seasons, brings forth abundant food for men and beasts and all the living beings on its surface, without reluctance and without altering any of His arrangements.... The great Creator and Lord of the universe commanded all these things to be at peace and in harmony; He does good to all, and more than superabundantly to us who have found refuge in his mercies through our Lord Jesus Christ. To whom be glory and majesty forever and ever. Amen.[21]

Augustine of Hippo (354-430) likewise leaves us in no doubt regarding his conviction that the world proclaims its contingency and creatureliness:

> Behold, the heaven and earth are; they proclaim that they were made, for they are changed and varied. Whereas whatsoever hath not been made, and yet hath being, hath nothing in it which there was not before; this is what it is to be changed and varied. They also proclaim that they made not themselves; therefore we are, because we have been made; we were not before we were, so that we could have made ourselves.[22]

Augustine writes of divine providence pervading the very matter out of which things are made; for this matter is passed on from smaller to larger animals and regardless of what form this matter takes on, "it is still ruled by the same laws which pervade all things for the conservation of every mortal race."[23] The ontological contingency of the world is for Augustine a proof for the existence of God, for creatures are completely devoid of the power to preserve themselves in existence,

> for the power of the creator, omnipotent and supporting all, is the cause by which every creature subsists. If such power should cease to rule what has been created, all would cease to be and nature would vanish. It is not like the case of a builder of houses. When he has completed the construction, he leaves, and after he has ceased working and has gone away, his work

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[21] Clement of Rome, *The Letter to the Corinthians*, ch. 20 in *The Fathers of the Church*, eds Ludwig Schopp, Roy J. Deferrari, Bernard M. Peebles, Hermenegild Dressler, O.F.M. (Washington: The Catholic University of America, 1962), 26-27.
[22] St Augustine, *The Confessions*, 4, in *A Select Library of the Nicene and the Post Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. Philip Schaff (Michigan, 1974), vol. 1, 165.
[23] St Augustine, *The City of God*, 12. From Schaff, vol. 2, 409.

> still stands. But the world could not stand, even for a wink of the eye, if God withdrew his ruling hand.[24]

Though Augustine grasped that *being* can be properly predicated of God alone, when it came to describing existence in philosophical terms he fell back on the Greek identification of being with immateriality, intelligibility, immutability and unity. As a result his ontology is essential rather than existential. Augustine's conviction that the world constantly depends on God to be kept in existence is based purely on theological grounds as he can find no way of asserting a complete dependence of created substance on another, albeit divine, substance. God is still conceived in the Platonic tradition as lying at the head of a hierarchy of substances; God, for Augustine, is the highest because he is pure spirit. God is conceived of as a ruling power.

The philosophical work of John Scotus Eriugena (810-870), a fellow countryman of Berkeley, is strongly influenced by a sense of divine providence. He attempts to translate the Christian notion of providence into philosophical language. Eriugena, in a manner very reminiscent of what Berkeley will term the "Divine Visual Language", speaks of creation as a theophany: creatures are a "speaking of the ineffable". He is strongly influenced by neoplatonism, and while he remains in intention an orthodox Christian, he *de facto* espouses neoplatonic pantheism. Eriugena has two reasons for considering that creation, being a species of motion, must be co-eternal with God: firstly, were it not, making (creating) would be an accident accruing to God; secondly, he considers that a temporal creation would imply a temporal God. Though at times Eriugena expresses his fidelity to the orthodox Christian doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, the general thrust of his thought is towards a creation through emanation:

> When we hear that God makes all things, we should understand nothing else but that God is in all things, i.e., is the essence of all things. For He alone truly is, and everything which is truly said to be in those things which are, is God alone.[25]

Furthermore, Eriugena adopts the neoplatonic doctrine of participation and concludes from it that all things, creatures and the Creator, can be reduced to one. This is the totality of Nature. Eriugena holds that "*praedestinationes"*–exemplary causes of created species–exist in the

[24] St Augustine, *Super Gen. 4, c.* 12, n. 22 PL 34, 304.
[25] Eriugena, *De Divisione Naturae*, 1, 72.

Word of God.[26] Though these archetypes are generated when the Word is generated from the Father, they are logically antecedent to the Word. Just as Berkeley's ectypes participate in the archetypes so too, for Eriugena, creatures participate in the *praedestinationes* which in turn participate in God. Both philosophers have difficulty in maintaining the distinction between these divine archetypes and their creaturely replicas; Eriugena concludes that God is "substantially all that he contains, the substance of all visible things being created in Him".[27] Eriugena's pious attempts to give a neoplatonic defence of the Christian concept of providence leads him into the heterodoxy of pantheism.

In response to the philosophically untenable dualism and emanationism of the Arab philosophers, especially Avicenna (980-1037), renewed philosophical attention was given to the notion of creation in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, in particular by Albert the Great (1200-1280), Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) and Bonaventure (1221-1274). The first explicit formulation of the Church's teaching on creation came in the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 where it was defined that creation was *ex nihilo, ab initio temporis* and free.[28]

Bonaventure too clearly follows in the Christian tradition. His notion of conservation is explicated particularly in his *Commentary on the Sentences of Aristotle*. In his *Breviloquium* he speaks of the universe as comparable to a book written by God:

> The universe is like a book reflecting, representing, and describing its Maker, the Trinity, at three different levels of expression: as a trace, an image, and a likeness. The aspect of trace is found in every creature; the aspect of image, in the intellectual or rational spirits; the aspect of likeness, only in those who are God-conformed. Through these successive levels, comparable to the rungs of a ladder, the human mind is designed to ascend gradually to the supreme Principle who is God.[29]

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[26] Here there is a striking similarity between Eriugena and Berkeley: in his work *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous* (chapter 3, section 5*)* Berkeley, clearly under the influence of Malebranche's ontologism, makes a distinction between the archetypal ideas in the mind of God and their ectypal copies: the archetypes serve to overcome the problem of how God conserves creatures that are not perceived by man.

[27] *De Divisione Naturae,* 3, 18. Quoted in Copleston, *History of Philosophy,* vol. 2, 125.

[28] See Denzinger, *Enchiridion,* 428 (355).

[29] Bonaventure, *Breviloquium, 2,* 12, 1, in *The Works of Bonaventure* (New Jersey, 1963), vol. 2, 104.

For Bonaventure, those who are not enlightened by the "brilliance of things created" are blind, and those who fail to discover the First Principle through all these signs" are fools.[30] However Bonaventure firmly asserted that it can be known by reason unaided by supernatural revelation that the world had a beginning in time. He stressed the historical view of the world: that each day had its proper place in the calendar from the first day the to the day of judgement.

The theme of creation's radical contingency is not the preserve of Christian theologians and philosophers; the mystic Julian of Norwich (1342-1416) presents a most striking image of creation's dependence on God's "making, loving and keeping" in her famous description of the universe as a small ball in the hand of God:

> He showed me a little thing, the quantity of an hazel-nut, in the palm of my hand; and it was as round as a ball. I looked thereupon with eye of my understanding, and thought: What may this be? And it was answered generally thus: It is all that is made. I marvelled how it might last, for methought it might suddenly have fallen to nought for littleness. And I was answered in my understanding: It lasteth, and ever shall [last], for that God loveth it. And so All-things hath their being by the love of God ... in this Little Thing I saw three properties. The first is that God made it, the second is that God loveth it, the third, that God keepeth it.[31]

Even in the more stolid English philosophical tradition, the conserving activity of God is still affirmed. Duns Scotus (1266/65-1308) makes it clear that the relation of a creature to God as creator and conserver can be said to be the same:

> For something that is both conceptually and in reality there is but one essential dependence of the same type upon something conceptually and really the same. But the existence [*existencia*] of a permanent or enduring creature is absolutely the same in creation and conservation, and the supporting term, namely, the divine volition, is absolutely identical both conceptually and in reality: and the relationship not only to the creator but also to the conserver is the same sort of essential dependence. Therefore [there is but one relation of the creature to God as creator and conserver.][32]

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[30] *The Journey of the Mind to God*, 1, 15, in *The Works of Bonaventure*, vol. 1, 16.
[31] Julian of Norwich, *Revelation of Divine Love*, ch. 5.
[32] Duns Scotus, *God and Creatures: The Quodlibetal Questions* (Princeton, 1975), 272.