CHAPTER 24

Peace and God

The traditions say that God is infinite. Chapter 8 found two opposite conditions hiding under that one word. Infinite diversity is internal structure without end. Infinite equality is no structure at all. It is the terminus, the state at which every distinction stops.

So when a tradition calls God infinite, which infinity does it mean? This chapter argues that classical theism has demanded both at once, and that six incoherent claims about God come from that double demand. Resolve it and two coherent Gods survive. The chapter develops one of them: a companion who shares existence with you and did not make it.

Chapter 23 showed which forms of religion block peace. This one asks what God is compatible with it, and answers in a set order.

Which infinity?

Six claims about God have already been removed by earlier chapters, each on structural grounds. Creation out of nothing fails as a transition from non-being (Chapter 9). A ground with no inner parts cannot also be a mind that chooses (Chapter 10); a complex ground escapes that objection. A God with no internal distinction cannot know or will anything, since knowing takes distinction (Chapter 10). Divine punishment cannot be deserved, because nobody authors himself (Chapter 20). Judging persons by creed instead of conduct is a moral confusion (Chapter 23). Scripture is not infallible (Chapter 17). One claim is left standing, as coherent and uncontested: that everything depends on God for its being.

The list is narrower than it sounds. A theist who never held these doctrines finds most of it aimed past her.

Suppose God is infinitely diverse. Then God is maximally differentiated, and, if that structure takes the form of detection, maximally conscious. Suppose instead that God is infinitely equal. Then God is the terminus, which earlier chapters found unintelligent and unconscious, with no capacity for value or purpose.

The confusion of the two is where the six incoherences come from. Creation out of nothing wants a God at the terminus who also knows and wills. The choosing ground and the God with no internal distinction make the same demand. So the resolution is to choose, because no third condition exists for a state to be in.

A ground, or a fellow inhabitant

Choose diversity, and the surviving side divides in two.

The first survivor is a sustainer: the ground on which everything else depends. Creation is read as dependence without origination. He keeps sovereignty, since nothing besides him stands on its own. He also answers for the causal order he holds in being, so the problem of evil returns at full strength.

The second survivor is a companion. He finds himself inside existence as you do. He sustains nothing and originates nothing. So he answers for nothing he lacks the power to prevent. His one mode of address is persuasion, which leaves the other person free.

What each must answer for decides the chapter's choice. Peace runs on persuasion, so its conditions are conditions a persuader satisfies and a sustainer need not. The chapter develops the companion and leaves the sustainer standing as the live alternative. The space of coherent options was drawn first, by arguments the politics never touched. So the fit with peace holds by construction.

A mind in time

This companion is inside the hierarchy of diversity, bounded by the terminus as every complex being is. On this account the foundation is unintelligent, so a mind lives above it.

This God may be contingent, and where he came from is left open. If the backward series of diverse states never ends, he has always existed. Otherwise his existence is a brute fact, or the work of some principle the book has not identified. The argument does not produce this God; it shows that he is coherent.

That he is a mind at all is the proposal's first posit, named and costed instead of proved. Infinite diversity fixes what a maximal mind would take in. It does not fix that anybody is there to take it in.

A condition from Chapter 13 bites here. Experience happens at an interface: something registered stands against the absence of the channel that registers it, as a sound stands against silence. A mind holding every contrast at once would have nothing to stand against, and would register nothing. The companion meets the condition because he is in time. Each registration stands against what he had not yet registered. He "lures and does not command", offering a perspective you are free to weigh or decline.

Whether such a God is good

Infinite diversity fixes capacity. A being of that kind registers every instance of suffering and flourishing, across time. It does not fix the direction of the current that rides on the registration. Chapter 14 conceded the outlier: a being who registers another's suffering with full clarity and is drawn to it. So goodness cannot be derived from structure alone.

What can be derived is narrower. Human cruelty runs mostly on engines of limitation. A group's borrowed worth outweighs an outsider's pain. Each engine needs a bounded position: something to defend, somebody to compete with. A being of infinite diversity holds no such position: no out-group, since every perspective lies inside his registration, and no rival. In him those routes to cruelty are idle.

The pure outlier remains possible. Against it the chapter offers one observation only: the inversion would be "a bare further fact", motivated by nothing in the being's situation. So benevolence is posited within the proposal. Withhold the posit and a weaker result stands: the God who survives the critique is one whose moral character structure does not fix.

The engines audited are human ones, so the audit is a projection. It is silent about engines unlike ours.

The objections the chapter answers

The gravest objection is that this God changes nothing. He sees every affliction and knows what would move each person. Grant him the power his nature seems to imply and he could heal the sufferer. A God who accompanies without delivering is either powerless or indifferent.

The chapter concedes the starting point without qualification. This God neither coerces nor prevents, and guarantees no outcome. The reply separates two perfections the objection runs together: knowledge is not power over nature. He is the best possible persuader, and persuasion still ends in your own taking up of the offer. To supply that uptake would be to cause the change directly, which is the manufactured assent the book refused. You may have a God who could guarantee rescue, or a God not answerable for its absence. You cannot have both.

The residue is listed in the open. Suffering in a natural order he did not design leaves no will for him to address. Some people no true perspective moves, and he can perform no triage at all. Petition goes too, at a cost the chapter calls large: a prayer asking him to act on the world has no addressee.

The second objection is hiddenness. J. L. Schellenberg argues that a perfectly loving God would leave nobody capable of relationship with him in unresisting unbelief. His argument bites harder on a God whose only approach is an offered perspective. The reply is that the sharpest form of that argument assumes a power to appear at will, which this God lacks by construction. His hiddenness is then a limit of his mode of being and no withheld good. The chapter does not claim to dissolve the objection, and marks the residue: smaller than the classical God's, and not zero.

What the chapter claims

The result that two coherent theisms survive on the diversity side is graded *established*, the rung below the book's top mark. It earns that mark by

inheritance, from results of Chapters 4 to 11, so a challenger has to reject one of those. Its chain runs through the terminus, so it holds only if the hierarchy of grounding ends somewhere, and whether undifferentiated being is possible at all is left open.

The companion God is graded *proposed*, the weakest rung: the most coherent option that survives the critique, and open to revision. It carries three posits. Two are mindedness and benevolence. The third is the set of considerations offered in his favour: religious experience, the dialogue shape of worship, and the fit with what believers report valuing. Those are costed as fit and no evidence. Fit moves only somebody who already has something to fit, which fixes who the proposal is for. To a reader with no leaning towards theism it offers coherence and nothing further, and does not pretend the three should move her.

Two results stand one rung higher, at *constructed*: the best positive account available, with live rivals left standing. The first is faith read as evaluative orientation, a sustained engagement with something experienced as transcendent, in place of assent to propositions. The second is the convergence with process theology. Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne described a temporal, responsive, persuasive God, and this chapter reaches one by its own route. The convergence is real but partial. Hartshorne’s God must exist, where this one may be contingent. Process thought also holds that everything experiences, down to the smallest parts. This framework allows only one version of that, as far as Chapter 6 concedes. So, on this account, the companion inhabits a world most of which experiences nothing.

Both of those results sit in the chapter’s own appendix, Faith Without Obedience. It holds what the companion makes of faith, worship and practice: consequences of the proposal and no part of its derivation. Decline the companion and those consequences go, and no earlier result goes with them.