

RATIONALITY AND FAITH IN GOD¹

• Robert Spaemann •

“The personality of man stands and falls
with his capacity to grasp truth.”

1.

To explain man's situation in the world, Plato came up with an allegory, the so-called allegory of the cave. In its simplest terms, it looks like this: human beings are sitting in a windowless cave. They sit in chains, facing a wall. A play of shadows is projected onto the wall; it is a cave-theater. Behind the backs of those who are chained is an artificial light source, in front of which figures are moved back and forth, and their shadows are cast on the wall. The people have never known any other situation but this one. They are unable to see one another, or even themselves, but only the play of shadows. For them, therefore, this play represents the only reality there is. They argue over this reality, they speculate about what will happen next in the drama, they come up with theories and make prognoses. Of course, there is a rumor floating around that there is such a thing as a true world outside of the cave, and that it is possible to get free and make it out there. But it is also known that there were some who had in fact gone outside and whose eyes were blinded by the light of the sun, so that they would not have been able to see

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anything at all if they did not have the patience to let their eyes grow accustomed to it. Thus the cave dwellers resist hand and foot if someone from the outside comes back to set them free.

By means of this allegory, Plato intends to present the world of ideas as the true reality and the material world as a mere image of reality. But we are able to modify the allegory a bit without distancing ourselves very much from Plato's intention. The sun, for Plato, is the image of the substantial Good, the highest Good, which motivates all the striving in the world as the final end, and which the Church Fathers later equated with God. And this is not far from correct, since Plato says that the Good itself is the ground not only of the reality of things, but also of their knowability and truth. In my modification of the allegory, we ourselves are not only spectators in the cave-theater, but also co-actors in the film. Our reality owes itself in every moment to the light of a creative projector and its band of film. I call it creative because it projects things and beings that are actually alive and even free within a certain framework to move themselves in this or that way. If the light were to go out, then the film and all of its figures would disappear into the darkness. They would not die, for indeed dying is still an event in the film and has causes that for their part belong to the film: disease, accident, murder, etc. The cutting short of the film is not a part of the film. But within the film, there is also a past that we extrapolate. We know that a child, whom we see, not only has parents, whom we also see, but also grandparents and great-grandparents, like any other child. And on the basis of observations made within the film, we are also able to develop extensive physicalistic theories about the world's past and its causal laws. The projector with the film band, which is in fact the cause of the whole thing, does not of course appear in the film. The Big Bang, for example, and perhaps even that which preceded the Big Bang, is still part of the film. But the projector never appears in the chain of causes, not even at the beginning. It is rather the ground and cause of the entire chain and of every single one of its links. The word "cause" does not have the same meaning, but is used analogously, when we refer it to prior conditions within the world and when we refer it to God.

What I am describing here is an image of what the word "creation" means. It does not mean an initiating event within the earthly reality, an event that we might stumble upon perhaps at some point in our investigations. Instead, it means that the entire process of the world and each of the tiniest events that take place within it

have their true ground in a creative will that lies outside of this process.

That this is the way things are is something we learn from an ancient rumor, the rumor about God. Strangely, human beings were never so completely immersed in the reality contained within the film, the “inner-worldly” reality, that they would have been completely closed to this rumor. Their need to understand reality was not satisfied by what they watched. The philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, the father of modern analytic philosophy, writes somewhere that it is a modern superstition that the laws of nature explain the phenomena of nature, when in fact they merely describe structural regularities. These regularities explain neither the things that happen, nor themselves. There is nothing logically compelling about them, as there is in mathematical propositions, even when they are formulated in mathematical terms. *The fact* that they can be formulated mathematically has instead always been—even for the natural scientist, for example, for Einstein—a reason for wonder and a proof of divine origin. Kant called it a reason for unceasing wonder that there are natural laws at all. This is not something self-evident, and it does not bring the search for what truly is self-evident, and which we call God, to an end.

Nevertheless, the progress of modern science is one of the causes that has driven away the rumor of God. This is connected on the one hand with the hasty extension of the domain of what can be produced, which gives us the intoxicating and misguided feeling of infinity, and on the other hand with the exponentially growing speed of the transformation of the relationships that constitute our lives. Our attention is thereby so strongly fixed on the endlessly renewed adaptation to the reality here below that the question concerning the purpose and meaning of the whole, and thus concerning the possibility of a reality outside of the cave, appears as something that is no longer within our grasp. This question has in fact nothing to do with the factual claims of the sciences. Not a single serious argument has yet been raised against the rumor of God by the sciences themselves, but by the so-called scientific worldview, i.e., by that which Wittgenstein calls the modern superstition. Science is the inquiry into conditions. It does not ask what something is, but rather what the conditions are under which it comes about. And it asks this because our knowledge of these conditions empowers us even to intervene in the course of things. This type of science is determined by the will to mastery over nature. To know

a thing, according to Thomas Hobbes, is “to know what we can do with it when we have it.” But the so-called scientific worldview, i.e., scientism, believes that we have understood what something is once we have come to understand how it has come about. Thus, for example, we know who we are once we know who our forefathers were, what knowledge or pain is, if we have understood their biological functions and thus the advantages they present in evolutionary selection and if we know the physiological processes in the brain that form the infrastructure of these phenomena.

We could bring the absurdity of this scientific worldview to light if we were to claim that we had explained the firing of certain neurons in the brain, which lie at the empirical basis of all pain, as the definition of what pain *is*. Let us imagine that I went to the doctor because of some severe pains, that the neurologist examined me and was unable to observe these precise physiological processes which are normally associated with the experience of pain. And then let us imagine that the doctor were thus to say to me: “You are not suffering any pain. Pain consists in the firing of certain neurons, and those neurons are not firing.” There is not a single one of us who would not respond: “Dear doctor, I don’t care about any neurons. If anyone knows whether I am suffering pain, it is I. And if you make it impossible for me to express my pain in an articulate way by taking the word away from me through your various definitions, then I will simply have to express it by screaming.”

Science is the investigation into causal conditions. To be a self means to be liberated from the conditions determining a thing’s existence. And that which is unconditional cannot appear within the search for conditions *per definitionem*. But God is the Unconditional *per definitionem*. When I said that the progress of science has driven the rumors away from the Unconditional, it is not because science has produced some argument against this rumor. The reason is instead a psychological one: scientific progress has dazzled us. It exerts a fascination. It creates the impression that science will ultimately end up explaining everything, even though this notion is as absurd as it would be for a person watching a film to expect the film ultimately to illuminate itself so that the projector would become superfluous.

No, the alternatives are never: “either we explain the world through science or we believe in God,” but only: “either we dismiss any understanding of the world,” i.e., we surrender reason, “or we believe in God.” The rationalism of the Enlightenment has long

given way within scientism to the belief in the impotence of human reason, to the belief that we are not in fact what we thought ourselves to be, namely, rational and free, self-determining creatures. Christian faith never considered man to be as reasonable and free as the eighteenth-century Enlightenment did. But it also does not consider him as unreasonable and unfree as the scientism of today does. And it grants a greater scope to reason, *ratio*, than scientism does. *Ratio* means both reason and cause [*Grund*]. The scientific worldview takes the world and thus itself to be groundless and irrational. Faith in God is faith in a reason for the world, which is itself not groundless, and therefore irrational, but “light”—transparent to itself and in this sense its own ground.

2.

With this, I come to the second part, namely, to the question: **what does one believe when one believes in God?** In a third section I would like to talk about the reasons that are able to prompt us, in the particular situation of our present age, to believe in the existence of God.

What does a person believe when he believes in God? As I said above, he believes in a fundamental rationality, he believes that goodness is more fundamental than evil, he believes that the lower comes from the higher and not vice versa, and he believes that meaninglessness presupposes meaning and that sense is not simply a certain kind of nonsense. **In more abstract and less rhetorical terms: when we think the concept “God,” we think the unity, indeed, the referential identity, of two predicates that are only occasionally and never necessarily bound together in our earthly experience of the world: the unity of absolute power and absolute goodness, i.e., the unity of being and meaning.** This unity is not an analytical truth, which means that it does not follow simply from the concepts themselves. Our words “powerful” and “good”—to use an example from the great philosopher and mathematician Frege—have as little the same meaning as the words “evening star” and “morning star.” Human beings were familiar with an evening star and a morning star for centuries before they discovered that the two stars were in fact one and the same, namely, Venus. The words “evening star” and “morning star” have a different meaning [*Sinn*], but the same signification [*Bedeutung*], as Frege put it, or the same “reference”

[*Referenz*], as one would more often put it today. Thus, for us the words “good” and “powerful” have different meanings.

The person who believes in God believes that absolute power, omnipotence, as we say, and absolute goodness have the same signification: the most holy God. In the notion of “God,” we think two unconditionalities at once, which are separate from one another in our experience. The one is the unconditionality of the factual. “The way all things interact is God. God is the way all things interact,” is how Wittgenstein puts it. Against what is and the way it is, there can be no objection. “*Ducunt fata volentem nolentem trahunt*,” is one of the Stoic proverbs. “Fate guides the willing and drags the unwilling.” “*Inshallah*,” “If God so wills it,” say the Moslems when they announce some intention. The Letter of the apostle James recommends the same to us. The believer accepts everything that comes to him as a gift from God’s hand; in some situations, he does so as he quarrels with God. When Job argues with God because of the misfortune that has befallen him, his friends want to explain to him that God is just and that he ought to look into himself and seek in himself the reason for his misfortune. Job does not see it this way, and God himself rebukes the friends for the way in which they took God’s side. If God reduces Job to silence, it is not by justifying himself to Job, but rather by saying: “Where were you when I established the earth? Tell me, if you are so clever. . . . Who reckons with God, who can instruct him? . . . Do you have an arm like God and can you thunder with the same voice as he? . . .” And Job’s response: “I have spoken foolishly about things too high for me and that I do not understand. . . . I had known of you only from hearsay. But now I have seen you with my own eyes. For this reason, I confess my guilt and repent in dust and ashes.”

Unconditional submission to the will of God, who makes himself manifest in the things that occur and that we cannot change, is the first and fundamental attitude of all those who believe in God. But what does it mean here to submit oneself to that which we cannot change even if we wanted? Is there not more human dignity in at least refusing to give our consent to what we cannot change? Only if we accept that God does not exist, that fate is blind and that the universe is as indifferent to our consent as it is to our protest, only then is our consent ultimately just as meaningless as our protest, and it remains merely an animalistic conformity. Job’s protest only has meaning at all because Job understands God to be a being to whom it belongs to be good. And precisely for this reason God in fact also

defends Job against his pious friends. In the protest there lies yet an acknowledgment of that to which one raises one's protest. If one were to assume God were evil or indifferent to earthly suffering, then it would make no sense to protest. The psalms beg God over and over to come to our aid "for his name's sake." This implies that God, so to speak, owes it to himself to come to the aid of his people. And when Léon Bloy writes, "*Tout ce qui arrive est adorable*," it is only because he believes against all appearances that whatever happens has its ultimate origin in an infinitely good, and that means, in a holy, will. And Islam, too, cannot be understood any other way.

It is important to emphasize this especially today, when even priests often speak only about God's kindness rather than calling down upon us the blessing of the almighty God. The talk about the loving God and the message that God is love indeed loses its overwhelming point if it makes us forget who it is that is love, namely, the absolute power that holds the world and us in existence. The gnostics of the first centuries dismissed precisely this point of Christian faith, insofar as they divided the two predicates between two Gods, an evil power, which brought forth this world, and a light, which radiates itself from afar into the darkness. Faith in God is the belief that the Word in John's Gospel is speaking about this light, which illuminates every man, the light that is coming into this world: "He was in the world and the world came to be through him."

I have spoken about the one unconditionality that is included in our concept of God, the unconditionality of the factual, of fate. The other unconditionality is that of the Good, which does not manifest itself, or does so only on occasion, in those things that actually occur, but rather in the quiet but inexorable voice of conscience. This voice was always understood by those who believe in God as the voice of God, even though it is possible to be mistaken about this voice, just like any other. For Thomas Aquinas, the voice of conscience, through which God speaks, is nothing other than the voice of practical reason, and reason too needs guidance and correction in order to be what it is: namely, reasonable. But its judgment is irrevocable. This irrevocable judgment, however, seems to us only too often to stand in contradiction to the things that happen in actuality. What happens is often what is evil and unreasonable. And no power in the world can compel us to call evil good and goodness evil. The person who believes in God believes that both unconditionalities, being and goodness, are ultimately one. And

if we say that God is hidden (“*vere tu es deus absconditus*,” writes Pascal), then that is why. The factual, the unconditional power of that which is, the way it is and that which happens, the way it happens, is to be sure not hidden, but evident. And goodness is also not hidden from us, but reason and conscience make it known to us. “*Notas fecisti vias vitae*,” “you have made the ways of life known to me”—the psalm verse stands above the high altar in the Salzburg cathedral. If we say that God is hidden, it is because the holy unity of omnipotence and love is not visible to us.

The great German philosopher Nicholas of Cusa spoke of a *coincidentia oppositorum*, a unity of opposites. And, moreover, that is how it is: If we think through one of the two unconditionalities all the way to the end with consistency, it becomes necessary for us to think the other unconditionality with it. The total concept [*Inbegriff*], the whole, of that which happens, the totality of all that is the case, would not be everything if moral convictions, if the voice of conscience, were not included in the idea. Absolute power would have insurmountable limits set to it, and thus would not be absolute, if it had a silent, merciless eye staring at it for all time. If goodness did not belong to being, then being would not be being, and thus everything. But the reverse is also true: The unconditionality of the good would not be unconditional if it did not include the will to involve oneself concernedly in the factual world with the expectation that this involvement was not condemned to absurdity from the outset by reason of the absurdity of reality. Fichte’s text, “On the reason for our belief in a divine governance,” makes precisely this point. The good belongs to being, but being likewise belongs to the good. Both are included within the concept of God.

But within the one side of the predicate pair “real” and “good” we find another antimony, namely, in the concept of goodness and of love itself. We think of God as the Just One, as the place of absolute and definitive justice. He does not remain deaf to the tears and cries of the victim shackled by injustice. “*Nil inultum remanebit*,” “nothing remains unavenged,” is what is said in the *Dies irae*. But we think of him at the same time as the place of absolute mercy and forgiveness, which transcends all human measure. The identity of justice and merciful goodness, which are included in our concept of God, eludes our power of imagination. It is only in the sacrifice of Christ that the darkness is illuminated for the believer. For this sacrifice means that God himself, in order to be able to forgive without injustice the sacrifice of the evil, made himself the

sacrifice and thus enabled himself to forgive. But this is another story, which we cannot tell in this context, the story of the projector's entry into the film, the Creator's entry into creation, which Christianity teaches. It thus teaches not a different God from that of Israel and Islam, but it makes the hidden evident. "You call him your God, but you do not know him. But I know him. And if I were to say that I did not know him, then I would be a liar, just as you are," Jesus says in John's Gospel.

Thomas Aquinas has the two unconditionalities in view, which we think within the concept of God without being able to comprehend them, when he speaks of God's two wills: the one, which manifests itself in that which happens, and the other, which relates itself to that concerning which he wills that we will it. The first will is hidden from us until the event has taken place, the second is known to us at all times. We could call the first the historical will and the second his commanding will. It is not up to us to try to will this first will; we are permitted only to submit to it. The second will, however, we ought to make our own and obey. Thomas gives an example: A man has committed a crime. God's commanding will obliges the one who possesses civil power to hunt down the criminal in order to punish him. It obliges the criminal's wife to come to her husband's assistance if he decides to hide. The responsibilities of the two parties are at odds, and God alone is responsible for the universe and for that which ultimately comes to pass. "When you have done everything," Jesus says, "then say, 'We are useless servants.'"

God's absolute historical will manifests itself in that which actually occurs, and thus in the man's being apprehended or in his escape. Both parties, the king and the wife, have to resign themselves to accept the final result, and neither ought to hinder the other in the fulfillment of his or her obligation. The king is not permitted to punish the woman for hiding her husband, Creon is not permitted to punish Antigone for burying her brother, and the woman is not permitted to become a terrorist and assassinate the king because he punishes her husband. God's historical will realizes itself in one—for us—inscrutable way with the help of constant violations of his commanding will. "O truly fortunate sin of Adam," the Church sings on the Easter Vigil, "which has won for us such a redeemer." Does this mean that God wills sins? Of course not. But they nevertheless serve his will. They are, as Mephisto says in Goethe's *Faust*, "a part of that power that constantly wills the evil and constantly produces the good." God is an artist, upon whose

paintings some miscreant constantly spatters paint, and who uses each of these paint spatters in order to make from it an even better version of the painting. In the end, one has to say: all of these spatters were necessary in order to bring about this perfect painting, just as Judas's betrayal was necessary in order to achieve our redemption in the form that it in fact took. Which does not mean that God could not have achieved his purpose in some other way. But the painting would in that case have become a different painting.

Every attempt to conspire immediately with God's historical will leads to disobedience with respect to his commanding will. "The Son of Man must be betrayed, but woe to the one who will betray him," says Jesus with reference to Judas' betrayal.

What does a person believe if he believes in God? He believes in an Unconditional, a Being that has its ground in itself, because it is Meaning itself, it is that which suffices unto itself. The Christian doctrine of the Trinity perfects the concept of God insofar as it thinks of God as almighty love. And, indeed, essentially as Love in himself, so that he has no need of the world and of human beings in order to realize his essence as love. In the latter case, that is, God would not be God; he would not already be in himself the whole, but instead God alone would be less than God and the world together, as if the mirror image of a candle were to add some brightness to the light of the candle itself. The world would then, moreover, not be God's free creation. Instead, it would be necessary to God in order to supply a deficiency in him. God is Love in himself, which means: He reflects himself in himself, he has an adequate Image of himself in himself, a living interlocutor, the Logos. And the coming-together-as-one in love with the Logos, the Son, occurs in a gift, which is once again God himself, the Holy Pneuma, or as we say in the West, the Holy Spirit. The mystery of Christianity, once revealed, proves to be the fulfillment of that which reason can glimpse only darkly.

3.

The rumor of God hangs in the air everywhere, wherever human beings are, in however deformed a manner. It was first conceptually grasped in Greek philosophy; it first loses its "rumor" character in Israel and thus becomes a community experience of

faith, until Jesus of Nazareth comes on the scene within Israel and says: "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father." But the question remains: Does this rumor correspond to something in reality? We know what we mean when we say "God." As Kant says, we have an infallible ideal of this highest being, a "concept that includes and crowns the whole of human experience." But what reason do we have to believe that, to use Kant's words again, "objective reality" can be ascribed to this concept? What reason do we have to believe that God is more than an idea, what reason do we have to believe that he exists?

There is a negative answer to this question: atheism; there is the anxious realization that no answer has been found up until this point; and there is the agnostic response, which says that there are principled reasons why an answer to this question cannot be found. All of these answers, however false they may be, deserve respect, they deserve indeed human conviction, not because they are true, but because human beings have identified themselves with them. But the view that the answer to this question is not very important, the view that all the other things that move us are in fact more important, and it is not worthwhile to spend one's time reflecting on God—views that are widespread today even if left for the most part unarticulated—deserve no respect. If there is a God and life after death, it is assumed, then at some point we will find that out. Whether a person is a decent human being, in any event, does not depend at all on whether he believes in God or not. Ultimately, the Muslim suicide assassins also believe in God; indeed, it is precisely this belief that motivates them to commit their crime. I say that this perspective deserves no respect. For it indicates, as Socrates once said, a very poor human being. What would we say about a man who was saved from a place of despair, whose life was given back to him, and who was showered with an abundance of favors, but who is not entirely clear whether the whole thing was an accident or the secret gift of a generous person—what would we think of the recipient of this gift if he were to say: "I'm not interested in this question. What I have, I have, and I don't care whether the love of a gift-giver lies behind this or not, for even if it did I wouldn't thank him"? A person whom we respect has the desire to give thanks if there is someone who deserves it. And he would do everything he could to find out.

And he would also like to be able to complain, if there is indeed someone there to hear him. There are, to be sure, various

things that would provoke a man to pose the question of God. The deepest motive is certainly this: to be able to express one's gratitude and to live out of that gratitude. It is not for nothing that the word for Christian worship is "thanksgiving," *eucharistia*. And joy goes along with thanksgiving. Contentment can accompany an attitude of acceptance, without a giver. But there is joy only if there is a person there whom one can thank. With the central human questions and with philosophy, which discusses these questions methodically and systematically, there stands at the beginning, just as in a court case, a decision about the distribution of the burden of proof or the obligation of justification. With respect to the overwhelming universality and endurance of the rumor of God, it is the one dismissing this rumor as misleading who bears the responsibility to justify himself. But above all: if we seek evidence of a being, then the person who has found evidence always holds more importance than the one who has found none. The fact that a person has never seen a white raven proves nothing in relation to the person who has discovered one. That person cannot say, "There is no white raven," simply because he has never yet seen one himself. By contrast, the person who has in fact seen one is entitled to say that it exists. No one has ever seen God, writes John the Evangelist. The question is: has the director of the film, in which we ourselves are actors, left his signature behind more or less hidden within the film, so that a person could find it if he in fact so desired?

Reason is the faculty man possesses to seek God. Not instrumental reason, which, as Nietzsche says, makes us resourceful animals, but rather the faculty by virtue of which man is able to transcend his environment and make contact with reality itself. The faculty that allows us, while at sea, to know that there are human beings sitting in the scarcely perceptible ship on the horizon, who play no direct role in the context of our life, human beings who just like we are in the center of their own field of vision and for whom we appear only at the edge of the horizon and likewise play no role at all. To believe that God exists means to believe that he is not our idea, but that we are his idea. It implies precisely what Jesus demanded from us: a transformation of perspective. Conversion. If God exists, then that is the most important thing there is. It is more important than our own existence. But to be able to know this is what constitutes the dignity of man, the dignity that distinguishes him from every other living thing. There is a great history of human efforts to give support to their conviction regarding the existence of

God by means of rational attempts to find evidence. Seldom has a human being come to faith in God by means of a proof of his existence, although such things do in fact happen. But Pascal is right to have God say: You would not have sought me if you had not already found me. And believers have always attempted to strengthen their intuitive certainty by rational grounds and to justify it. The fact that the proofs for the existence of God, taken as a whole, are disputable, is not very significant. If a radical decision concerning the direction of our life depended on proofs within the field of mathematics, then these proofs would also be considered disputable. Nevertheless, the proofs for the existence of God are *ad hominem* arguments, i.e., they always already take for granted a particular human being and particular presuppositions. Leibniz, who knew what a proof is, once wrote that all arguments are *ad hominem* arguments. There is no proof that does not require some prior assent to certain presuppositions from its addressee, even in mathematics. The fact that the classical proofs for the existence of God from Aristotle to Descartes, Leibniz, and Hegel appear to have lost their power to convince stems from the fact that these proofs on the whole presuppose something as given, which first of all Kant and then above all Nietzsche would not admit. The question is: What may we and must we take for granted in order to find the reasons for faith in the reality of God illuminating?

Let us briefly take a look first of all at the traditional proofs for the existence of God. We can divide them into two groups. First is the so-called ontological proof for God's existence, which St. Anselm of Canterbury thought up in the twelfth century, and which Thomas Aquinas and Kant rejected, but which nevertheless convinced great thinkers such as Descartes, Leibniz, and Hegel. The Anselmian argument infers the reality of God from the mere concept of God, without making any reference to anything in the created world, for the concept indicates that being than which nothing more perfect can be thought. With the thought of such a being, however, we have already left the mere immanence of our thought and transcended it, because, according to Anselm, an actually existing God would be more perfect, precisely because he actually exists, than a merely thought God. We must therefore think of God as actually existing, so to speak, *per definitionem*. Thomas objects that even the thought of God as something existing beyond our thinking is still nevertheless only a thought. Kant makes a similar argument, when he writes that real existence is not a property, a characteristic,

that can be added to other characteristics. There are also in the twentieth century brilliant philosophers who still find Anselm's argument coherent and defend it.

But this is not what I wish to talk about today. I am able to go into even less detail concerning St. Thomas's arguments, the famous "five ways," which fall into the second group. They all start from the existence of the world, in which they discover traces of the Creator. I will mention in this context only two of these arguments. One of them, the so-called proof from contingency, starts from the fact that the things and events of this world, but also the laws of nature, do not possess any inner necessity; everything could be different from the way it is. But the accidental can exist only against the backdrop of the necessary. There must be a reason for the fact that it exists the way it exists, if thought is to avoid collapse. But the being that exists on the basis of its own inner necessity is what we call God. The other proof has been the most popular through the ages. It proceeds from the indisputable existence of ordered processes, e.g., the growth of plants and animals. Processes that are intelligible only in relation to their end. Thus, we can understand the flight of birds to Africa in winter only if we know that they find their nourishment there. But, according to Thomas, the birds themselves do not know this, and still less do plants know the program that guides their growth. The target is not in the arrow taken in itself, but in the mind of the archer. Thus, in order to understand the processes of nature that are ordered to a "target," there must be an "archer," i.e., a Creator, who has implanted in things an orientation toward that which is good for them, for it is only as something consciously understood that a goal can, as it were, have a "retroactive" effect and set a causal process in motion and coordinate it, because the process presupposes an awareness of the goal.

The first blow against the proof for God's existence was dealt by Kant with the thesis that our theoretical reason and its constitutive instruments, the categories, are suited only for ordering the data of our sense experience. And in this context, the idea of God too plays a systematizing role. But Hume's line applies also to theoretical reason: "We never do one step beyond ourselves." Reason does not enable us to say something about reality itself, and it does not allow us to speak about God, to the extent that he is more than an idea. Only practical reason, only the experience of conscience, allows us—indeed, obliges us—to accept the existence of a being that unifies the two unconditionalities, being and goodness, and guaran-

tees that the course of the world does not lead the good will *ad absurdum*. “I must limit knowledge in order to make room for faith,” Kant writes. But then Hegel complains that Kant has too limited a notion of reason, limited, that is, to the reason of modern science, for which, as I have already tried to show, God cannot be a possible object.

Nietzsche was the one, however, who dealt the fatal blow, by calling into question in a fundamental way the presupposition that lay at the basis of all traditional proofs for the existence of God. The French philosopher Michel Foucault formulated most succinctly what Nietzsche was the first to think: “We are not permitted to believe that the world turns a face to us that we can read.” What Nietzsche called into question in a fundamental way was reason’s capacity for truth and therewith the thought that there is such a thing as truth in the first place. This thought has for him a specifically theological presupposition, the presupposition that God exists. Only if God exists is there something other than subjective images of the world, something like “*Dinge an sich*,” about which even Kant still spoke. These are things such as God sees them. If there were no such thing as God’s regard, there would be no truth beyond our subjective perspectives. Nietzsche speaks of Plato’s faith, which is also the faith of the Christians, namely, the faith that God is truth, and that the truth is divine. All of the proofs for the existence of God thus depend on what logicians call a *petitio principii*. These proofs presuppose precisely what they intend to prove: God.

Is this correct? Yes and no. At a theoretical level, it is not correct. Thomas Aquinas, for example, never explicitly presupposes any thesis concerning the logical structure of the world and reason’s capacity for truth in his “five ways.” But he does presuppose these things implicitly. The fact that these presuppositions in the end have their ground in God is for him ontologically clear, even though this doesn’t enter into his theoretical epistemological reflections. When it is a matter of the question of the validity of the first principles of our truth-functional thinking, then he simply argues like Aristotle by showing the *reductio ad absurdum* of the contrary. Whoever denies reason’s capacity for truth, whoever denies the validity of the principle of contradiction, forfeits the capacity to say anything at all. Indeed, even the thesis that there is no truth presupposes truth, at least the truth of this statement. Otherwise we end up in absurdity.

But here is where Nietzsche introduces his objection: Who is to say, in fact, that we do not after all live in the absurd? To be

sure, we do entangle ourselves in contradictions by saying so, but that is the way it is. Doubt about reason in itself cannot articulate itself in a logically consistent way. We have to learn how to live without truth. When the Enlightenment achieves its purpose, it will have undermined itself, for, as Nietzsche writes, "We too, we Enlightenment thinkers, we free spirits of the nineteenth century, still live on Christian faith, which was also Plato's faith, that God is truth and that truth is divine." If the Enlightenment abolishes itself, the result is called nihilism. In Nietzsche's view, however, this creates the open space necessary for a new mythos. But of course, this too is something one cannot ultimately articulate, because it is simply not possible to say what is true. The only question that remains is the question of with what lie man is best able to live. We are familiar with the story about the graffiti: "God is dead. Nietzsche," under which someone wrote: "Nietzsche is dead. God." But something of Nietzsche has remained. What remains is the battle against the banal nihilism of the entertainment society, it is the precise and desperate awareness of what it in fact means to say that God does not exist. And what remains theoretically is the insight into the inner and inseparable connection between faith in the existence of God and the notion of truth and of the human capacity for truth. These two convictions determine one another. Once the thought of living in absurdity has arisen, then the merely theoretical epistemological *reductio ad absurdum* is no longer a sufficient refutation. We can no longer rest the proofs for the existence of God on the sure foundation of the human capacity for truth, for this foundation is sure only if we presuppose the existence of God. We thus cannot have one without the other. We do not know who we are until we know who God is, but we are not able to know anything about God if we do not perceive the trace of God that we ourselves are, that we are as persons, as beings that are finite but free and capable of grasping truth.

The trace of God in the world that we have to take as our point of departure today is man; it is we ourselves. But this trace has the peculiarity that it is identical with its discoverer, and thus does not exist independently of him. If we, as victims of scientism, no longer believe ourselves, who we are and what we are, if we allow ourselves to be persuaded that we are merely machines for the spreading of our genes, and if we take our reason to be nothing more than the product of evolutionary adaptation, which has nothing to do with the truth, and if the self-contradiction of this

claim does not horrify us, then we cannot expect that anything at all will be able to convince us of the existence of God. For, as we said above, these traces of God that we ourselves are do not exist unless we want them to, even though—thank God—God exists perfectly independently of them, whether or not we recognize him, know about him, or give him thanks. It is only we ourselves who can cross ourselves out.

The notion of man's imaging of God, which is often employed only as an edifying metaphor, acquires an unsuspectedly precise meaning. To image God means: to be capable of grasping truth. In this context, love is nothing other than truth brought about in deed. Love can indeed be translated into the becoming real of the other for me. There is no other concept in the New Testament tidings that has a more central significance than the notion of truth. "For this I was born and for this I have come into the world, that I might bear witness to the truth," Christ responds to Pilate's question whether he is a king. This response stands until today next to Pilate's own: "What is truth?" The personality of man stands and falls with his capacity to grasp truth. It is called into question today by biologists, evolutionary theorists, and neuroscientists. I cannot enter into the discussion that has erupted in this context. But I would at least like to insist that every purely spiritualistic insight of man has been overtaken today by naturalism. For naturalism, however, knowledge is not what it takes itself to be. Knowledge does not instruct us about what is, but rather consists in adaptational survival strategies in relation to the environment. But how can we know that if we in fact do not know anything? The fact that man is nature through and through, that he is a natural being and has arisen from subhuman life, this fact becomes something other than fatal for man's self-understanding only if nature, for its part, has been created by God and the production of man corresponds with a divine intention. For this, it is not necessary that the process of evolution—which I would prefer, with Darwin, to call the process of descent with modification—be understood as a teleological process, i.e., it is not necessary to deny that the generator of novelty in this process is chance. Something that occurs by chance, when seen from the perspective of science, can be as much the divine intention as something recognizable by us as a process ordered to a goal. God works as much through chance as through the laws of nature. If biologists speak of "fulguration" and "emergence," in order to give words to the inexplicable, then believing in God means that this

emergence of novelty has a name, which does not ultimately reduce the new back to the old: the name “creation.” The capacity to grasp truth can be understood only as creation.

I would like to clarify what I mean, namely, the fact that truth presupposes God, by means of a final example, a proof for the existence of God, which is, so to speak, Nietzsche-resistant, a proof for the existence of God that is based on grammar, or more precisely, on the so-called *futurum exactum*. The *futurum exactum*, the future perfect, is for us necessarily conceptually connected with the present. To say about something that it is now is at the same time to say that it will have been in the future. In this sense, every truth is eternal. The fact that on the evening of 6 December 2004, a large number of people gathered together in the Hochschule für Philosophie in Munich for a lecture on “Rationality and Faith in God” was not only true on that evening, it is always true. If we are here today, then tomorrow we will have been here. The present always remains actual as the past of the future present. But what sort of actuality is this? A person could say: it is real in the traces that it leaves behind through its causal impact. But these traces become fainter and fainter. And they are only traces insofar as that which left them behind is recalled for what it is.

To the extent that past events are remembered, it is not difficult to answer the question concerning their mode of being. They have their reality precisely in being remembered. But at some point memory comes to an end. And at some point there will no longer be any human beings on the earth. Ultimately, the earth itself will disappear. Because a present always belongs to the past, whose past it is, we also have to say: if the past disappears, then so does the conscious present—and presence exists only as something known—and so, too, the *futurum exactum* loses its meaning. But this is precisely what we are unable to think. The sentence, “In the distant future, it will no longer be true that today we were gathered together,” is nonsense. It cannot be thought. If it will ever be true that we were not here, then we are in fact not really here now, just as Buddhism has consistently claimed. If the present reality will at some point no longer have been, then it is in fact not really real. Whoever dismisses the *futurum exactum* dismisses the present.

But once again: what sort of reality does this reality of the past have, the eternal truth of every truth? The sole answer can be: we have to think of a consciousness in which everything that happens is taken up, an absolute consciousness. No word can later be

unspoken, no pain unsuffered, no joy unexperienced. What has happened can be forgiven, but it cannot be made not to have happened. If there is such a thing as reality, then the *futurum exactum* is inevitable and, with it, the postulate of God's reality. "I am afraid," Nietzsche wrote, "that we are not free from God, because we still believe in grammar." But we cannot get around believing in grammar. Even Nietzsche could only write what he wrote because the very things he wanted to say, he entrusted to grammar.
—Translated by D. C. Schindler. □

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