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# **The Good, the Bad and Those Who Think They Are**

## **An investigation of the theology and science of Charity**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Why do people do good things? Experimental research showed that people are more likely to donate to a charity when there is some perceived reward in it for them. The same research also concluded that more religious people are more likely to respond positively to promises of reward and recognition. Possible explanations for this behaviour include sociobiological reciprocal altruism and indirect reciprocity. But theological explanations are also viable particularly scholasticism and the Thomistic ordering of love. However, it would appear that a minority of people do indeed give without consciously expecting anything in return. Possible explanations for this behaviour include psychological notions of self-actualisation and theological Thomistic ordering of love and liberation theology. None of the explanations necessarily exclude the possibility of divine action working in and through nature and the actor.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The word ‘altruism’ is attributed to Auguste Comte to describe benevolence that is in contrast to selfish egoism. Used in this sense, altruism defines an ethical theory in which only actions that have “for their object the happiness of others possess a moral value” (*The Catholic Encyclopaedia*, 1913 ed., s.v. “Altruism”). In Comte’s view, the happiness found in living for the good of others should be the aim of all action.

Contemporary use of the term altruism more precisely describes an action performed for the good of another at some cost to oneself without any intention of receiving rewards for such behaviour from external sources (Pope 1994:5).

Macquarrie (1986: s.v. “Altruism”) links this definition of altruism to Christian ethics by pointing out that the New Testament calls on Christians to love their neighbours as themselves, and even to love their enemies (Lk 10:25-28). This same scriptural commandment is used as the basis of the definition for the Christian virtue of Charity<sup>1</sup> given by the Roman Catholic Church (*The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, hereafter CCC: 1822, 1825).<sup>2</sup> The Catechism of the Catholic Church further emphasises the sacrificial nature of Charity by pointing out that Christ died out of love for us (CCC: 1825), the supreme act of Charity (Jn 15:13). It is understandable then that philosopher Michael Ruse, in stereotyping Christian ethics, suggests that a true Christian should “give without reservation or limit to others, without discrimination to relative, friend, foe or stranger, and continue, no matter what harm befalls [one’s self]” (Ruse 1985 in Pope 1994:61). Ruse’s position is supported by scriptural texts such as “humbly regard others as more important than yourselves” (Phil 2:3 New American Bible, hereafter NAB).

Therefore there is a parallel between the notion of altruistic behaviour as self-denying acts for the benefit of others and the theological doctrine of Charity. Christian Charity can be broadly defined as altruistic, and thus selflessly for the benefit of another person.

Empirical research conducted in a large South African bank found that people were more likely to respond to an appeal to donate to a charity if there was something in it for them. Subjects were offered a potential monetary reward, reputational reward through public recognition of their good deed or a combination of the two. In fact, the response rate when both monetary reward and recognition were offered (9.11% of subjects donated) was almost double that of the control group (4.59%) who were offered neither recognition nor reward (For details on the method of this research see Kirchhoffer 2003).

Considering the definition linking altruism and Charity as being acting selflessly for the benefit of another, only 4,59% of respondents in the study can be considered altruistic. The rest either didn’t donate or were coaxed into donating by the promise of some reward for themselves.

Therefore we would expect that those 4.59% who donated without expecting anything in return are also the most religious, in that they are practicing the theological virtue of Charity by loving their neighbours.

What was surprising however was that people who donated under the condition that offered reward and recognition were significantly more religious than those of the control group (Kirchhoffer 2003). In other words, those who were more religious were *less* altruistic or Charitable because they gave under conditions where there was something in it for them.

Why? How is it that a religion can exist for two thousand years, and one denomination of that religion, namely Roman Catholicism, can claim nearly 20 percent of the world's population as followers, yet this inequality and apparent lack of Christian Charity can persist? Is it possible that Christianity describes an ideal state that is beyond the reach of the average human? Is it possible that our biology and culture preclude the kind of self-sacrificing Charity called for in Christian doctrine? How valid are theological doctrines of Charity in the light of scientific explanations of altruistic behaviour? Unless the human capacity for altruism is in fact a scientific reality, there is a certain pointlessness in recommending it, otherwise one is simply playing with the idealistic illusions of philosophers and theologians.

The following sections discuss the potential theological and scientific explanations for the research results described above. The aim is to determine which of these positions, namely the scientific or theological, present a more valid explanation of human charitable behaviour and the associated capacity for Charity and altruism.

First, the result that people were more likely to donate when offered a financial reward and/or public recognition of their good deed is considered.

Thereafter, consideration is given to the possible reasons for the result which showed that the more religious a person, is the less likely she is to give freely without expecting anything in return.

## **POSSIBLE MOTIVES FOR ALTRUISTIC BEHAVIOUR**

The higher response rates in groups which were promised potential reward or recognition support the sociobiological explanations of altruism that propose some material or social benefit to the actor, namely reciprocal altruism and indirect reciprocity. Sociobiology is an evolutionary approach to human behaviour that aims to provide a scientifically based account of the evolutionary basis of the fundamental capacities, inclinations and corresponding behaviours that comprise human nature (Pope 1994:4). It concerns itself with what E.O. Wilson (1975:595) called “the biological basis of all social behaviour.”

Sociobiologists argue that pure altruism, i.e. the kind of altruism that is synonymous with Christian Charity as a selfless act of kindness toward another person, is not possible because it is contrary to the principle of natural selection (Trivers 1985:41). Natural selection proposes that every living thing is primarily concerned with the proliferation of its genes into the next generation. Appropriate behaviours lead to successful generation of offspring and therefore, one's own genetic complement or *genotype* (Hull et al 2001: 61-

66). Therefore, altruistic behaviour for its own sake makes no sense. Sociobiologists thus seek explanations for altruism that do not contradict the fundamental principles of natural selection. Therefore, for altruistic behaviour to occur, there must be some benefit to the individual's inclusive fitness, whether that benefit be a direct or an indirect consequence of the action. By inclusive fitness, sociobiologists mean all individuals that share the same genetic make-up or *genotype* as the actor (Grafen 1991:9). The results of the experiment support the theories of reciprocal altruism and indirect reciprocity.

Reciprocal altruism occurs when one performs an altruistic act for another, because one is likely to benefit when the other returns the favour (Fehr and Gächter 2003). In this case, whilst the orphans could certainly not have reciprocated the generosity, there was the potential for immediate material gain in the form of a monetary prize if one donated.

Indirect reciprocity is similar to reciprocal altruism but does not rely on benefit being gained from the individual being acted upon but from other quarters of the community. This depends on recognition of the altruistic act by other members of the community. The altruist's initial benefit is a gain in reputation, which may translate into more direct increases in fitness by allowing access to better mates and/or resources due to the altruist's improved status in the community (Fehr and Gächter 2003). The promise of public recognition of one's charitable act by the leadership of the organisation in which one is employed could certainly be seen as enhancing one's status. Considering that the organisation in this study recently launched a values programme that encourages values-based behaviour, the argument for indirect reciprocity as a motivator becomes even stronger.

But, the response rate of the control group, i.e. no recognition or reward, was 4.59%. The assumption can be made that a similar proportion of the responses in the groups offered reward and/or recognition were made by people who had motives similar to those in the control group, i.e. they were not primarily motivated to donate by the promise of reward or recognition.

1. Self-actualising tendencies.
2. Disinterested scholastic duty.
3. The fundamental option for the poor.
4. Thomistic proportionate love of a stranger in dire need.
5. Religious habituation.
6. The action of the Holy Spirit.

Each of these seven possible motives is discussed in turn below.

## **1.1 Solidarity with Humanity**

Evolutionary, although not strictly sociobiological, bases can potentially explain giving based on human solidarity. Human beings (*Homo sapiens*) are one of millions of species on this planet. In evolutionary terms therefore, it is more likely that we will aid one of our own rather than another species. It is possible that there are inherited “whisperings” (Barash 1979:31) in our genetic makeup that stimulate sympathy for any human being in need based on a time when environmental circumstances were quite different. Just about anything that wasn't human was food, a competitor or a direct threat to one's own survival. Allegiance to the species in these circumstances was very important if the species was to survive and may have been key to ensuring the kind of social co-operation that enabled human beings to dominate the world.

At best however, although this cannot be quantified, I think that human solidarity broadly defined cannot explain more than a very small proportion of the responses by the control group. There was no human trigger such as a picture of a suffering child or an emotional description of the suffering of these children that would stimulate a person to donate based on solidarity with the sufferers as human beings.

Such a donor would be a person who is particularly sensitive to the notion of humanity, someone who has not been desensitised by the media filling our minds with human suffering to the extent that we become indifferent. Studies show that desensitisation leads to children waiting longer before calling an adult to intervene in a physical altercation between peers and a reduced sympathy for the victims of domestic abuse (Cantor 2002: 4).

The pervasive nature of television means that these effects are probably widespread.

## **1.2 Self-Actualisation**

This motive follows on from the first. The tendency toward self actualisation is included as a possible motive because it represents a widely accepted model of human psychological development, i.e. Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow 1987). The lower levels of this hierarchy explain human behaviour in much the same way as does sociobiology. People have instinctual needs for food, security, belonging and esteem (Hergenhahn 1994:528). But once these needs are met people begin to self-actualise. Self-actualising people are motivated by the 'being values' like truth, goodness, beauty, justice and perfection (Hergenhahn 1994:533). It must be understood that there is an inherent drive in human beings toward the higher needs. As the lower needs on the hierarchy are met so the higher needs become more

important and accessible. Understandably therefore, these higher needs, like esteem and especially self-actualisation only occur relatively late in an individual's development. Typically, the higher needs do not become important before the onset of middle age, if at all (Maslow 1987:57-59).

Self-actualising people share a number of other characteristics, one of which is that they tend to identify with all humankind. They are concerned about the well-being of the whole world, not just their family and friends, with a genuine desire to help humanity (Hergenhahn 1994:538). However, the reservations regarding human solidarity as a motive (1.1) also apply here, because of the lack of emotional triggers in the appeal. Even a self-actualising person is likely to need another human subject with whose plight she can emotionally sympathise.

Therefore, for Maslow's notion of self-actualisation to be a viable explanation of the charitable donations received, we must assume that 4.59% of the people in the organisation were self-actualising at the time that they received the appeal. These people should therefore, have most or all of their other needs met and would probably be middle aged or older. Therefore, one would expect the majority of these donors to be older managers earning larger sums of money than the average.

The average age of the total sample for the control group was 35.83 years of age while the average age of the respondents in the control group was 39.10 (Kirchhoffer 2003).

This means that on average, the respondents were three years older than the people in the original sample. I should seriously question whether a difference of just over three years in the mean age could account entirely for people deciding to make a donation or not.

Thus, whilst Maslow's theory is certainly worth considering, there is little evidence to support it as a primary cause of the giving seen in the Control Group.

### **1.3 Disinterested Scholastic Duty**

This is the first of the theological motives to be considered. Scholasticism produced codified manuals designed to provide precise guidelines to confessors on the exact nature of various sins and the appropriate penance. The principle at play in scholastic teachings regarding altruism is that Charity is a moral obligation that is controlled by the will. An adherent of this theology would give a prescribed amount of money to worthy causes on a regular basis in order to avoid supernatural punishment and to ensure entry into heaven in the afterlife (Pope 1994:19).

The problem with this type of Charity as a motive for those who donated in the control, is that a person who felt obliged to give a certain amount of their income to avoid sin is likely to have a routine manner in which they give. For example, they may put a set amount of money into the church collection plate every Sunday. Therefore, an *ad hoc* request for money is unlikely to elicit a positive response from such a person if they believe that they have already fulfilled their duty.

In addition, because scholasticism emphasises a legalistic religion, one would expect ‘scholastic’ donors to have a higher degree of religiosity, i.e. the frequent practice of rituals and prayers in order to meet the minimum obligations of their religion. However, as already pointed out, the results showed that this was not the case and religiosity was significantly higher in the group that responded to recognition and reward (Kirchhoffer 2003).

This result will be discussed further in Section 2. It is thus unlikely that scholastic Charity contributes a great deal to the base response rate in the control group. Of course, there are probably exceptions.

#### **1.4 The Fundamental Option for the Poor**

In liberation theology, exemplified by the writings of Gustavo Gutiérrez (e.g. Gutiérrez 1979; Pope 1994:26-31), the emphasis is on the universal humanity and the Church's explicit teaching of the fundamental option for the poor. The main motive is justice.

Liberation theology contains a strong emphasis on self-sacrifice for the benefit of others. It opposes the excesses of the wealthy and powerful and calls for a radical conversion to correct the structures that perpetuate these imbalances (Pope 1994:26-31). Thus the motive here is similar to human solidarity and self-actualisation in that it is primarily concerned with improving the human condition.

Where liberation theology differs from human solidarity and self-actualisation is in its direct connection with the teachings of Jesus Christ. This adds an element that may enhance the motive for Christians in particular to contribute. The added motivation comes from a belief that in loving their neighbours, and the poor in particular, they love Christ, and will be duly rewarded in the kingdom of heaven (Mt 26:31-46). Those who do not will be damned to “the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (Mt 26:41 NAB). In liberation theology, one is expected to give generously with no consideration for one’s own well being (Lk 18:28-20), and to give to all who ask (Lk 6:30).

The kind of Charity described by liberation theology is powerfully

emotive, much more so than scholastic duty, but it still carries with it threats of punishment and promises of reward, thereby providing a strong motive to donate in conditions where there is no obvious material or reputational reward.

### **1.5 Thomistic Proportionate Love of a Stranger in Dire Need**

Thomas Aquinas presents a theory of Charity that is both theologically sound and based in the science of his time.

“The strength of Thomas’s position is in no small part due to his willingness to employ interpretations of biological dimensions of human nature within his understanding of the ordering of love” (Pope 1994:67).

According to Thomas Aquinas, one should typically order one’s Charity to those closest to one’s self. Thus, one would devote most of one’s energies to family, who share biology and resources, then friends, who share resources, then civil and religious leaders and finally strangers and enemies (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (hereafter ST) ST II.II.26.6 ob1, in Pope 1994:61). Thomas points out however that there are times when a stranger is worthier of Charity than family or friends because of dire need (ST II.II.31.3, in Pope 1994:64). This view is neither as radical as liberation theology nor as obligatory as scholasticism. The person identifies a need, and does something to help without placing their own well-being or that of their family at risk.

Again, it is important to remember that this is still theologically motivated, and as such carries with it all the overtones of virtue, reward, punishment, love of God, etc. It is however a more practical explanation of the thought process that many Christians might undergo when trying to find a motivation to make a donation based on the kind of appeal sent to the control group. In addition, it acknowledges that human beings have an inherent predisposition, genetic or otherwise, to favour those who are either genetically related or able to reciprocate, and that this is not necessarily contrary to teachings regarding the virtue of Charity.

This resonates with the fundamental theological axiom that grace perfects, but does not destroy, nature (ST I.1.8 in Pope 1994:59).

### **1.6 Religious Habituation**

This explanation falls into the sociobiological school. Since the time of the Neanderthals, humans have produced over 100,000 religions (Wilson 1978:176). This makes it a culturally universal phenomenon and one that sociobiologists ascribe to a genetic predisposition. Johnson et al (2002:912) argue that altruistic behaviour in anonymous conditions can be best explained by religious taboos and codes of conduct that encourage co-operation for the

public good and threaten supernatural punishment for those who do not adhere to these codes. The genetic predisposition is toward co-operation and survival. Human culture adds the additional dimension of forming cultural structures, in this case religion, that keep people honest and good thereby encouraging co-operation, a key behavioural trait that has led to human dominance of the world.

I would add to Johnson et al (2002) that the behaviour may not only be motivated by threat of supernatural punishment but also by supernatural reward. Jesus, for example, highlights that God rewards those who do good things in secret (Mt 6:4). Sociobiologically, the benefit is received when a person performs a similar altruistic behaviour in a more public forum or toward a powerful member of society who is able to return the favour. Hence the strength of the religious codes perpetuates.

Groups with costly religious practices that signal commitment to the group and its values outlive non-religious groups because of the benefits of increased co-operation (Johnson et al 2002:912).

Most religions contain, as one of their fundamental doctrines, ‘the Golden Rule’, that one should treat others the way that one would like to be treated (Ziglar 1998:192). By doing to others what we expect them to do to us, we build a more honest, helpful and humanitarian society. Whilst it may benefit an individual not to co-operate in circumstances that are anonymous, fear of potentially being caught out might keep them honest. In the long term, honesty is the best policy.

In the control group, by donating regardless of anonymity, an individual remains an honest participant in a just society. When circumstances change and anonymity is no longer available, this person will be shown to be good and will benefit from indirect reciprocity and reciprocal altruism accordingly.

The elegance of this explanation is that it covers most of the possible reasons that a person would donate under anonymous circumstances. Human solidarity is in there, self-actualisation is in there, scholastic duty, liberation theology and Thomistic ordering of love are all encompassed by this sociobiological/sociological explanation. In other words, no matter what a person’s conscious motivation for giving anonymously with no promise of direct reward may be, there is likely to be a deep, unconscious, inherited whispering that finds expression in cultural norms, that causes people to donate. The problem with such an all-encompassing explanation is that it is difficult to refute. It also doesn’t explain why 95% of the control group chose not to donate. True, some people may plan their Charitable giving in line with scholastic duty – a Charity of the will – and therefore not respond to this

appeal. But surely that can't apply to 95% of the organisation?

If the ultimate cause of these anonymous donations is a deep-seated genetic predisposition, why is it that the majority of people ignore it?

Perhaps the answer lies not in the genetic whisperings, but in the strength of the cultural conditioning acting on those genetic cues. For example, it could be argued that religion with its strong moral obligations has lost ground as an absolute way of life, a dominant aspect of modern western society. Similarly, the dog-eat-dog world of competitive capitalism defines the life and therefore the values of many people. Bearing in mind that this study took place in a bank, a stereotypically capitalist and competitive organisation, is it not possible that the dominant culture of this workplace, and therefore of the majority of people who work there, does not encourage kindness to the weak? Instead such a culture seeks to subjugate and profit from them.

Therefore, the notion of religious habituation is a strong argument as an ultimate cause of the results obtained.

## **1.7 The Action of the Holy Spirit**

This explanation has been left until last because it is the one most difficult to quantify. The Catechism of the Catholic Church defines the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity as follows.

... [T]he theological virtues ... adapt man's [*sic*] faculties for participation in the divine nature. ... They dispose Christians to live in a relationship with the Holy Trinity. They have the One and Triune God for their origin, motive and object.

... They inform and give life to all the moral virtues. They are infused by God into the souls of the faithful to make them capable of acting as his children and of meriting eternal life. They are the pledge of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the faculties of the human being

This can be interpreted to mean one of three things.

Firstly, it could mean that acts of Charity can only be performed by Christians. However, the results demonstrated that people of other religions also donated.

Secondly, it could mean that all acts of Charity are a consequence of the direct action of the Holy Spirit. It implies that the Holy Spirit acts in people regardless of their religion and that He doesn't act equally in all people all of the time. But the most important caveat to this interpretation is that it implies some degree of theological determinism or predestination. In other words, it ignores free will. If the Holy Spirit acting in a person is the only cause of person performing altruistic acts, then the person has not acted out of free will but only by virtue of the Holy Spirit acting through her. She is only a passive

vessel. It implies that regardless of one's personal feelings regarding Charity, if the Holy Spirit decides to use you, then you will be Charitable. But, free will is an integral part of our humanity as much as our openness to the prompting of the Holy Spirit is.

“Man [*sic*] is rational and therefore like God; he is created with free will and is master over his acts” (St Irenaeus in CCC: 1730).

Therefore, the third interpretation makes the most sense by building on the second but adding the essential element of human free will.

A human being is open to the prompting of the Holy Spirit but also capable of freely choosing to act one way or the other. A human being, when being Charitable, is bearing testimony to the presence of God, the Holy Spirit, as immanent sustainer of creation. The person is not always or perfectly Charitable because the human faculties are geared toward action that is most appropriate, based on the stage of their biological, psychological and spiritual development, environmental and cultural cues and the laws of survival – the laws of evolution as created by God. This resonates with Thomistic ordering of Love.

The Catechism goes on to define Charity as “superior to all the virtues.” (CCC: 1826)

“[I]t is the form of the virtues; it articulates and orders them among themselves; it is the source and the goal of their Christian practice. Charity upholds and purifies our human ability to love, and raises it to the supernatural perfection of divine love” (CCC: 1827).

This resonates with the qualities of a self-actualising person. “The fruits of charity are joy, peace and mercy” (CCC: 1829), qualities which Maslow would have no problem identifying in self-actualised people (Hergenhahn 1994:538). Is it possible that the ordering of love proposed by Tomas Aquinas is not only descriptive of the way in which the average person should relate to others, but also describes human psychological and spiritual development? If Charity, in its purest form, is the greatest of all the virtues, and is demonstrated by the kind of love Jesus showed for his disciples as well as his enemies [Love one another as I have loved you (Jn 15:12)], then is it not possible that this is the goal of human psychological and spiritual development? In the words of St Augustine,

“Love is itself the fulfilment of all our works. There is the goal; that is why we run: we run towards it, and once we reach it, in it we shall find rest” (CCC: 1829).

As the goal, and greatest virtue, is it not also something rarely achieved? Therefore, our genetic makeup and cultural inheritance predispose us to certain behaviours. With time these behaviours, in themselves, evolve until we find existential, often religious, meaning and become self-actualising. Allied to

this is a profound Charity for all humanity, that still rests in the solid foundation of the reciprocal relationships of close family and trusted friends. All of this could ultimately be a consequence of the Holy Spirit working in and, more importantly, through, nature.

In conclusion, the results demonstrate that the sociobiological explanations that point to ultimately selfish motives behind altruistic acts as a result of genetically inherited behavioural traits do make sense. More importantly however, the discussion has shown that there are a number of parallels between sociobiological, theological and psychological explanations of altruism. In particular, the genetic predisposition that leads to the increased response rates when people are offered reward and/or recognition may be modified by culture, including religion, and the stage of psychological development. In fact, there appears to be evidence of a possible genetic predisposition toward this psychological development, which culminates in a deeply spiritual and humanitarian outlook on life. This could be an area for further investigation. If God is the creator and sustainer of this intricate web of factors influencing the altruistic motives of individuals, then He can also be considered an ultimate cause.

### **MORE RELIGIOUS, MORE SELFISH?**

If sociobiological explanations of altruism are more valid than theological ones then the control group should have shown the highest degree of religiosity. This would be because those who donated under anonymous conditions would most likely be practising Charity as religious virtue and therefore probably seeking spiritual, emotional or existential reward rather than material or social rewards. But the results showed that religiosity was highest in the group that was offered both reward and recognition, not in the control group (Kirchhoffer 2002).

The solution may lie in the definition of religiosity. For the purposes of the experiment, religiosity was defined as the frequency of religious practice. Religiosity was measured by the responses to the question: “How frequently do you partake of the rituals and prayers required by your religion?” Possible answers were: never, on special occasions, monthly, weekly, or daily.

A person’s answer to this question is an indication of how frequently they partake of the external practices of their religion. It does not measure how religious or, more precisely, how spiritual that person may be. The problem may lie in the measurement of extrinsic rather than intrinsic religion. The following discusses this distinction and its implications for this study.

Section 1.2 discussed self-actualising tendencies in Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Self-actualising people are more concerned with 'being values' like truth, goodness, beauty, justice and perfection (Hergenhahn 1994:533).

These values are the types of things that people find bring meaning and purpose to their existence and form the basis of many religious doctrines. This may explain why Maslow found that self-actualising people have what he calls peak experiences, which are defined as mystical, oceanic experiences accompanied by feelings of ecstasy and rapture (Hergenhahn 1994:534). One could go so far as to suggest that these might be interpreted as religious experiences. But, self-actualising people also demonstrate a strong ethical sense and tend to accept democratic values. They act based on understood ethical implications rather than on the basis of race, gender or religion. Hence their tendency to identify with all of humankind. But most importantly for this argument, they are non-conformist and resist cultural norms that are contrary to their personal values (Hergenhahn 1994:538-539). The reason this is so important is that it is quite likely that self-actualising people may reject many aspects of formal religion in favour of more universal ethical truths fuelled by faith in their own peak experiences.

Gordon Allport, who, like Maslow, falls within the humanistic-existential school of psychology, defines two kinds of religious practice. Firstly, extrinsic religion is the kind of religion described by the behaviourists and sociobiologists. It is a religion that believes in a god who favours one because one believes in him. This religion is like a special club or in-group (Hergenhahn 1994:221), which serves the needs of its members by encouraging reciprocal altruism. However, Allport also defines a second type – intrinsic religion – which is mature and truly spiritual in nature. It provides a person with a meaningful relationship to the totality of existence and positively directs the course of a person's life and development often toward self-transcendence and identification with all humanity (Hergenhahn 1994: 221-222). There are obvious similarities between this kind of religion, Maslow's self-actualisation, and the radical Charity of liberation theology.

Now, considering that Maslow speculated that only about one percent of people were self-actualised (Hergenhahn 1994: 539), one can only conclude that the majority of people fall short of these ideals. Therefore, with regard to religiosity, whilst elements of intrinsic religion may be evident in aspects of a person's life, in the same way as aspects of self-actualisation may find expression, the majority of people are likely to be practising extrinsic religion, and are motivated by needs such as belonging and esteem.

Sociobiology also provides a potential explanation for this result. According to Wilson “religion is above all the process by which individuals are persuaded to subordinate their immediate self-interest to the interests of the group” (1978:176). Allied to this is the golden rule, which is enforced by guilt and punishment, the benefits of reciprocal altruism and the promise of supernatural reward. In some cases, this supernatural reward is emphasised in this life. I have personally sat in congregations where the preacher has emphasised reward in this life if one is a good steward of what one has already. Taken literally, i.e. in terms of material wealth, or figuratively in the sense of spiritual wealth, such a doctrine provides a good incentive to love your neighbour as yourself. After all, you will reap what you sow (Gal 6:7).

Scholasticism describes Charity as a moral duty to avoid sin and ensure entry to heaven. Liberation theology promises heaven and God’s love to those who support the cause of the poor and marginalised, those who hunger and thirst for what is right (Mt 5:6). And Thomistic ordering of love advocates Charity to those who are closest to you first, those in whom you have a vested self-interest. Self-sacrifice in the Thomistic sense, like scholasticism, is a practice of virtue, it is good for the soul. It is clear that all of these interpretations of the theological doctrine of Charity carry with them an element of self-interest, whether material, social or spiritual.

I speculate that other religions would surround the golden rule with similar promises of reward and punishment. The genetic predisposition to social co-operation makes this an almost universal phenomenon. Hence, if religion is an almost universal phenomenon and it is couched in promises of reward for good behaviour, then the majority of people who actively participate in these religions believe that reward is commensurate with sacrifice. Thus, when faced with an appeal offering reward and recognition to them as good and virtuous members of the community – bearing in mind that this is a primary reason for people belonging to an extrinsic religion whether we choose to explain it in sociobiological terms or in terms of Maslow’s Hierarchy – then these people will be more likely to donate. Hence the significantly higher religiosity in the group offered reward and recognition.

Why else would Jesus warn of hypocrites who only do good things in public (Mt 6:1-8)? Is it because they were rare occurrences in the religion of his time? On the contrary, I believe they were all too common, and powerful. The consequence of his public criticism of them was his death.

Further investigation is required to test this solution, possibly by identifying self-actualisers in a religious community and comparing their values and charitable practices with those of the main body of believers. It

would also help if one could clarify the particular theologies ascribed to by donors to control the prosperity/reciprocity elements inherent in many theologies.

## **CONCLUSION**

Absolute conclusions are difficult to make due to the multiplicity of variables that can affect the behaviour of the human person. There are however a number of important trends, or elements, that stand out and should not be ignored in either theological or scientific discourse on the nature of the human person and her relationship to God.

This analysis has shown that there is little inherent conflict in the theological and scientific explanations of Charity. It is true that they base their explanations on different core assumptions and in different language, but neither says something contrary to the reality of human experience. If we understand the action of God as being both in and through creation, then the biological explanations are not condemned by theology but rather complemented by it, and vice versa. This study is an example of how a preparedness to approach science and religion with a view to dialogue can lead to an enhanced understanding of the human person, both scientifically and religiously.

Scientifically we know that inherited genetic predispositions to certain behaviours, in this case altruism, play an important part in the structure and function of modern society. There is a biological and social tendency in most people to co-operate for the common good. An important element of this co-operation is doing good things for other people. People are more likely to do good things for other people if there is something in it for them. That something may be material, social, psychological or spiritual in nature.

Theologically we know that human beings are capable of Jesus-like Charity toward humanity, but that this is rare. It may occur occasionally in people who are still focussed largely on Charity toward those closest to them genetically or idealistically in line with sociobiological predictions as well as those of scholastic and Thomistic theology. Typically however, it is expressed in people who have developed psychologically to a point where they have found existential meaning in life, practice intrinsic religion and begin to more consistently demonstrate the traits of self-actualising people as explained by the hierarchy of needs and liberation theology.

Neither the sociobiological nor the theological explanations refute the possible action of God in human behaviour or the action of human free will.

Most importantly, I believe this study has pointed to the possibility of a

meta-theory that combines theological, biological and psychological motives for Charity into a coherent, comprehensive, and fruitful set of ideas.

This is an important area for further research, particularly if we seek to encourage Charity as a relevant and necessary virtue in everyday human life.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>For the purposes of this study, the uppercase (Charity) will be used when referring to charity as a Christian virtue. All other uses of the word will be lowercase.

<sup>2</sup> The usual way of citing Roman Catholic Magisterial documents is by paragraph. Therefore, when citing the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the number following the abbreviation (CCC) refers to a specific paragraph in the document rather than a date of publication.

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# Galileo Rehabilitated

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PETER HODGSON

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## THEOLOGY AND SCIENCE

Galileo was first and foremost a scientist, intent on discovering more about the natural world. Like everyone else at that time, he accepted the Aristotelian-Ptolemaic cosmology with a stationary earth at the centre of the world and the sun, planets and stars revolving around it. This cosmology was naturally accepted by contemporary theologians as the best available, and formed the implicit background to their theological work. Thus, for example, heaven was situated beyond the outermost stellar sphere. Furthermore, it is in full accord with many passages in the Bible, such as the one in Joshua where the sun is commanded to stand still, implying that normally it is moving<sup>1</sup>.

As a result of his studies of the work of Copernicus, followed by his own astronomical discoveries, Galileo became convinced that the Aristotelian cosmology is false, and that the heliocentric cosmology of Copernicus is correct. He realised that the theologians would see this as a serious threat to Aristotelian philosophy in general and would raise difficulties for Biblical interpretation and indeed for the whole of Catholic theology. As a devout Catholic he was anxious to prevent the Church rashly condemning a scientific theory that might eventually be shown to be true<sup>2</sup>. In the front of his own copy of his book *Dialogue Concerning the two Chief World Systems* Galileo wrote:

Take care, theologians that in wishing to make matters of faith attendant on the motion and stillness of the sun and the earth, in time you probably risk the danger of condemning for heresy those who deny the earth stands firm and the sun moves in time, I say, when sensately or necessarily it will be demonstrated that the earth moves and the sun stands still”<sup>3</sup>

This distinction between being convinced that something is true and being able to prove that it is true by a series of logical steps is crucial to the understanding of the Galileo affair.

The central question, then and now, is how to interpret the Bible, who has the authority to do so, and how the interpretation is related to the conclusions of contemporary science. In Galileo’s time, this was of great importance and delicacy due to the Protestant Reformation. We may well be astonished that theologians were so paranoid as to make such a fuss about a

few incidental references to the sun's motion in the thousands of pages of the Bible, but they realised that a vital principle is at stake: once let the authority to interpret the Bible slip from the divinely guaranteed hands of the Church to any individual, there is no knowing where it will lead.

Augustine, Aquinas and other theologians laid down several rules governing Biblical interpretation. Firstly, since God is the author of the Bible and also the creator of the natural world, there can be no contradiction between the interpretation of the Bible and established scientific knowledge. From this it follows that if there appears to be some disagreement this must be due to a misunderstanding or to inadequate knowledge. St Augustine was quite clear that if a truth about the natural world is definitely established, then the Bible cannot be interpreted in a way that contradicts that truth. The Bible is given to us to teach us how to save our souls, not truths about the world that we can find out for ourselves. More concisely, the Bible tells us how to go to heaven, not how the heavens go.

Secondly, several possible meanings of a text must be distinguished. Thus the bare, surface meaning of the words may be distinct from the literal meaning. The literal meaning is always true, since God is the author, but this is not necessarily the same as the surface meaning. Thus, for example, passages mentioning the right hand of God, or God showing anger or walking in the garden cannot be interpreted according to the surface meaning of the words.

These principles of Biblical interpretation were accepted by all Catholic theologians, and also by Galileo.

Copernicus wrote his book for professional astronomers, so it was unintelligible to laymen. He had no difficulties with the Church authorities and in addition it had a preface written by Osiander without Copernicus' knowledge saying that the heliocentric theory was simply a calculational device with no relation to reality. This certainly did not represent Copernicus' view because, like all scientists, he believed that our calculations relate to the real world. This easy way to avoid theological difficulties is unacceptable. Galileo was thus clear that he was discovering things about the real world. He wrote in vernacular Italian and lost no opportunity to publicise his views and to stir up debate, and so the whole question came to the notice of philosophers and theologians

Galileo remarked that some Aristotelian philosophers, unable to defeat him on scientific grounds, shifted to theological grounds and attacked him by saying that heliocentrism is inconsistent with the Bible. Thus, although he would have preferred to be left in peace to continue his scientific studies, he was inevitably drawn into theological arguments

## **THE TWOFOLD NATURE OF SCIENTIFIC DISCOVERY AND TRUTH**

There are two ways of showing the correctness of a scientific theory. One is by seeing how it makes intelligible a number of separate observations and the other is by direct observation. This distinction is crucial for understanding the disagreement between Galileo and the Inquisition in a way that makes their actions intelligible, inevitable and indeed justifiable, each from their own point of view.

Scientists experience the twofold nature of scientific proof in the course of their work, but it is almost impossible to explain to anyone who has not had that experience. When a scientist first studies a problem, it often makes little coherent sense. He then gathers the results of observations and experiments and thinks about them. Newton was once asked how he made his great discoveries. 'By setting my mind continually unto the problem', he replied. And then, quite suddenly, and often when the scientist is thinking about nothing at all, light dawns and it all becomes clear. Everything falls into place and it is then just a matter of putting it all together and tidying up the details.

Science does not advance by a series of logical steps but by leaps of the imagination. Of course what is imagined must afterwards be checked and verified logically, but logic on its own would never get there.

There are many examples in the history of science of this process of discovery, such as Kekulé's discovery of the structure of benzene, Hamilton's discovery of quaternions and Poincaré's discovery of the Fuchsian functions. In each case there was an extended period of intense work when all the information was collected together, followed by a period of relaxation. Then suddenly and unpredictably the solution comes; Kekulé's in a dream, Hamilton's when he was crossing a bridge and Poincaré's when he was getting on a bus<sup>4</sup>.

These are examples of the way the mind attains truth. Those of us who are teachers have the familiar experience of carefully explaining something to a student, only to be met with blank incomprehension. One then repeats the explanation and then eventually the student suddenly says 'Aha, now I see!'

This faculty of integrating many disparate observations is found in other contexts, such as the interpretation of an X-ray picture by a radiographer or of a bubble chamber photograph by an elementary particle physicist. This can be done only by someone who has years of experience.

Newman has called this faculty of combining together many separate observations to attain certainty the illative sense. He gives as an example our certainty that Britain is an island. We know this because we have looked at

maps, and every time we checked them by going to the seaside they were correct. Many other facts support this conclusion. The definitive logical proof is attained by actually walking around the whole coastline. We would regard this as unnecessary and if we did it we might well feel that we had wasted our time. These are the two methods of scientific discovery<sup>5</sup>.

It is worth remarking that the first method of discovery is far more compelling psychologically than the second. The first integrates into a whole many separate observations and provides an integrated picture, whereas the second, while it is perhaps logically better, is one-dimensional and could be subject to error. This is why the heliocentric theory was accepted by astronomers long before the detection of stellar parallax by Bessel over two hundred years later.

Throughout his life, Galileo accepted the Aristotelian criterion of truth as certain knowledge through causes, and so did not formally recognise the above distinction between two ways of knowing. Nevertheless, by his scientific creativity and physical insight he came to have insights about the world that do not satisfy Aristotle's criterion but are attained through the convergence of many separate observations.

## **ARGUMENTS FOR THE GEOCENTRIC THEORY**

Galileo had not only to prove the heliocentric theory, he had to refute the arguments against it that appeared to favour the geocentric theory. First of all, do we not see the sun moving round the earth every day? Aquinas knew that this can be answered by saying that we would see just the same apparent behaviour if it is indeed the earth that rotates. Furthermore, on the geocentric theory, we have to believe that the whole starry sphere also rotates every day. Comparison with the heliocentric theory shows that the motions of the sun, planets and stars have a rotational component in common, so that it is much easier to suppose that it is the earth that rotates.

A more cogent argument in favour of geocentrism is that if the earth moves round the sun then we would expect the relative positions of the stars to change with the seasons. This can be answered by saying that the stars are at such an immense distance, so much larger than the earth's orbit that the changes in the relative stellar positions are imperceptible. In Galileo's time this seemed to be very implausible, but now we know that it is true. Once this is admitted, the argument in favour of the earth's rotation is greatly strengthened.

Another argument against the earth's rotation is that it would generate such high winds that everything would be blown off it. This is answered by Galileo's work on relative motion, since the air and the objects on the earth

move in the same way. The argument that if the earth is rotating, a stone dropped from a great height would fall so as to hit the ground far to the west of the point directly below the point of release, can be answered similarly. The argument that if it is moving the earth would lose its moon has the same reply, and it is also refuted by the moons of Jupiter.

Thus all the arguments for geocentrism and against heliocentrism can be answered, and in the process it becomes evident that the earth rotates on its own axis as well as moving around the sun each year. With the additional knowledge that the earth's axis is inclined to the plane of the ecliptic it provides an explanation of the yearly seasonable variation of the climate.

Galileo's observations also showed that parts of the Aristotelian geocentric theory cannot be correct. Thus, the observation of the satellites of Jupiter showed that there is at least one additional centre of rotation. The sunspots and nova provided evidence of change in the celestial realm, and the mountains on the moon showed that it is not a perfect sphere. The observation of the phases of Venus showed that it orbits the sun. These and similar observations showed that some parts of the Aristotelian geocentric theory are untenable, and this threw doubt on the whole theory. However, it remained necessary to show that the heliocentric theory is correct.

## **THE ARGUMENTS FOR THE HELIOCENTRIC THEORY**

Copernicus became convinced of the correctness of the heliocentric theory by the order and simplicity that it brings to the description of planetary motions. In the Dedication of his work he writes that in the heliocentric system 'not only their phenomena follow therefrom, but also the order and sizes of all the planets and spheres and heaven itself are so linked together that in no portion of it can anything be shifted without disrupting the remaining parts and the universe as a whole'.

As Holton remarks,

'if the orbits are measured with respect to the sun, Mercury has the smallest relative radius and the smallest period of revolution, and as one goes to the more distant planets one finds their periods increase, until one arrives at the 'fixed' stars, having an infinitely long period. The power of this solution was precisely its restrictedness. There is nothing arbitrary, no room for the smallest ad hoc rearrangement of any orbit, as had been quite possible in the pre-Copernican work. Copernicus' system as a whole revealed a sparse rationale, a necessity that binds each detail to the whole design. Hence it carries the conviction that we understand why the planets are disposed as they are, and not otherwise'<sup>6</sup>.

This combination of simplicity and logical necessity is immensely compelling to the scientific mind. It is impossible to appreciate the force of the argument without actually studying the numbers. As Galileo said: ‘Philosophy is written in this grand book, the universe, which stands continually before our gaze. But this book cannot be understood unless one first learns to comprehend the language and read the letters in which it is composed. It is written in the language of mathematics, and its characters are triangles, circles and other trigonometric figures, without which it is humanly impossible to understand a single word of it; without these, one wanders about in a dark labyrinth’<sup>7</sup>. Following Copernicus, Galileo also became convinced of the correctness of the heliocentric theory, and his conviction was strengthened by his observational discoveries.

In drawing their conclusions scientists draw on their theologically-based convictions of the order of nature and the power of the human mind to discover it. Einstein has called it ‘the cosmic religious feeling’ and maintained that it is the ‘strongest and noblest motive for scientific research’<sup>8</sup>.

Galileo was convinced of the correctness of the heliocentric theory as a result of his studies of the motions of the sun, planets and stars. He knew that it is possible to describe their motions quite accurately by Ptolemy’s cycles and epicycles, but this is obviously just a mathematical scheme without physical basis. A physicist always wants to get what might be described as the physical feel of the problem, and by this he means an intuitive understanding of the phenomenon that enables him to know roughly what is happening and how it will behave in the future. Then he can set up a model to describe the behaviour in mathematical terms. The predictions of the model are then compared with measurements, and the model systematically adjusted to maximise the agreement between them.

A familiar example is the knowledge of projectile motion attained by a tennis player. He knows very well from experience the sort of trajectory the ball will follow after it has been hit. He knows that it will not suddenly loop the loop and if he were shown a film of a ball doing that he would reject it as a fake.

Galileo discovered the four satellites of Jupiter in 1609 and realised that this is a dynamical system with several smaller bodies orbiting a larger one, each with a characteristic period. He lacked any quantitative understanding of what is going on, but he did have a physical feeling about the motions. He supposed that Jupiter rotates and somehow conveys this rotation to the satellites around it. It was years later that Kepler described the rotations in such a system accurately, and subsequently Newton’s theory of gravitation

provided a coherent description that follows from general principles. Galileo had also observed the phases of Venus, which prove that Venus orbits the sun. His intuitive understanding of the motions were then sufficient to suggest the further conjecture that all the planets, including the earth, similarly orbit the sun. In his third letter on sunspots, which provide evidence of the sun's rotation, he conjectured that it is 'quite probable and reasonable' that 'the sun, as the highest minister of nature, as if it were the heart of the world, gives not only light, as it clearly does, but also motion to all the planets which revolve around it'<sup>9</sup>. Additional evidence is provided by the earthshine of the moon, which shows that the earth is illuminated by the sun, just like the other planets. A final proof is provided by the need to take into account the motion of the earth when calculating the times of eclipse of Jupiter's satellites.

A great puzzle of the geocentric theory is the retrograde or looped motion of the planets as seen against the background of the stars. This obviously makes no dynamical sense at all. And then suddenly came the illumination: if Copernicus was right, and all the planets including Venus, the earth and Jupiter rotate around the sun, the retrograde motion is easily and naturally explained. They do not loop at all; just like the satellites of Jupiter they move with uniform speed around the sun. As a simple diagram shows, when one planet is observed from another, it just appears to loop<sup>10</sup>. This advantage of the Copernican system was known to earlier astronomers.

To go back to the tennis player, if he were told that the film of a tennis ball looping the loop was taken by an acrobat making a somersault, he would be willing to accept that the film is a true one.

When Galileo looked at the motions of the planets from the point of view of heliocentrism, other observations fell into place. Thus the further a planet is away from the sun, the longer its period of rotation about the sun, which is dynamically reasonable. Furthermore, if the origin of the solar system is due to the close collision of two large bodies, the closeness of the planetary orbits to the plane of the ecliptic is explained. When everything slots into place like this, the conviction of its essential correctness becomes very strong. It is a characteristic of this way of knowing that each individual piece of evidence is inconclusive and can be denied by anyone unwilling to believe, but the whole is conclusive. The heliocentric theory became generally accepted by astronomers during the next few years, and the seal was finally set on it by Newtonian dynamics. When the definitive proof from stellar parallax came two hundred years later, it caused little stir.

This sudden illumination helps us to understand how scientists are often sure of a particular result long before they are able to demonstrate it in a way

that is acceptable to the non-expert. Indeed scientists often perform experiments designed to convince others of a result that they already know to be true. It is thus not at all surprising that Galileo was sure that the heliocentric theory is correct although he was not able to prove it according to the Aristotelian criteria that he accepted together with the philosophers and theologians who did not share his detailed scientific knowledge. Yet because he was certain, he thought that it would be easy to find a proof that did satisfy the Aristotelian criterion, but in this he was mistaken.

When a scientist has achieved such an illumination it becomes almost impossible for him to recapture his previous mindset. It is now all so clear that like Archimedes he wants to shout 'Eureka' and tell the world. Galileo did tell the world, but they would not listen. Some of the Aristotelian philosophers like Cremonini even refused to look through Galileo's telescope. This is perhaps not quite so stupid as it sounds, because the very act of looking might be taken as implying an acceptance of the possibility that they might see something that would lead them to change their views. But even if they had looked they would not have been able to understand or interpret what they saw.

Not a temperate man at the best of times, it is no wonder that Galileo lashed them with his sarcastic tongue, pouring scorn on their stupidity. 'As Copernicus himself put it, idle babblers, ignorant of mathematics, enjoyed no right to pronounce against his writ on the basis of a Scriptural passage 'basely twisted to their purpose'<sup>11</sup>. He also remarked: 'If there are those who babble nonsense and then dare to object to my statement, let me remind them that astronomy is written for astronomers' (i.e. the only persons who are qualified to judge an astronomical book are professional astronomers'). Alberico Gentili told theologians to 'keep quiet about a matter outside your field'. As Galileo pointed out, his opponents were doing a disservice to Aristotle, who would have been open-minded enough to reconsider his views in the light of new experiences<sup>12</sup>.

## **THE JUDGEMENT ON GALILEO'S HELIOCENTRISM**

The first attack on Galileo from a theological point of view was made by a Dominican friar Fr. Tommaso Caccini, when he preached on the book of Joshua on 21 December 1614. The attack was so intemperate that the Master General of the Dominicans felt obliged to apologise to Galileo. A copy of a letter that Galileo had sent to his friend Castelli was forwarded by another Dominican Fr. Niccolo Lorini on 7 February 1615 to Cardinal Sfondrati, the secretary of the Holy Office. Hearing of this, Galileo wrote a more detailed account of his views in a letter to the Grand Duchess Christina. This letter was

sent in June 1615 to his friend Archbishop Dini in Rome, asking him to forward it to the Holy Office. Later that year Galileo went to Rome in person and energetically lectured and debated the subject. He succeeded in showing that some parts of the Aristotelian cosmology are untenable, thus throwing doubt on the whole theory, but failed to prove the heliocentric theory.

The letter addressed to the Grand Duchess Christina was circulated among philosophers and theologians. In it he reiterated the traditional Catholic principles of Biblical interpretation already mentioned, namely that since God is the author of all truth there can be no disagreement between well-established scientific results and the Bible, properly interpreted. He explained that the purpose of the Bible is to teach us truths necessary for salvation and not to provide information about the natural world, though this may be mentioned incidentally. If it had been the intention of the Divine author to provide such information, it would have been done in a much more systematic way.

Thus when we are faced with a passage of the Bible that appears to be contrary to a scientific result, it is first necessary to establish the science beyond doubt:

It seems to me that in discussing natural problems we should not begin from the authority of the Scriptural passage, but from sensory experiences and necessary demonstrations. Holy Scripture and nature proceed alike from the divine Word...Everything that is said in the Bible is not bound by rules as strict as those which govern natural events, and God is no less excellently revealed in these than in the sacred pronouncements of Scripture<sup>13</sup>.

Thus Galileo was obliged by his own principles to consider heliocentrism as false and contrary to the Bible as long as it was not proved to be indubitably true according to the accepted Aristotelian criteria. The difference between Galileo and the theologians of the Inquisition arose because they were convinced that the geocentric theory is indubitably true, and interpreted the Bible accordingly, whereas Galileo was convinced that the heliocentric theory is true, although he was not able to prove this according to Aristotelian criteria of proof or in any way that could be understood by the theologians.

Galileo is often praised for the way he drew a sharp distinction between the Bible that teaches us only spiritual truths and scientific studies that teach us about the natural world. It is true that in his letter to Castelli he said that the Bible 'only' teaches spiritual truths, but in his letter of 1615 he changed this to 'principally' teaches, thus admitting that the Bible may teach us truths about the natural world<sup>14</sup>. Indeed he explained how the text from Joshua can more easily be interpreted on the heliocentric theory, thus using the Bible to support

a scientific theory. Similar arguments were made by Cardinal Bellarmine. Thus Galileo was far from being a daring innovator in theology; he held just the same views on Biblical interpretation as the theologians of the Inquisition.

Early in 1615 a Carmelite friar Fr. Antonio Foscarini sent Bellarmine a book that he had written on the Copernican theory in which he tried to show that it is consistent with the Bible. In his reply, Bellarmine praised Foscarini for presenting the Copernican theory as a hypothesis and not as a physical truth. He reminded Foscarini that he was obliged to follow the rules laid down by the Council of Trent, in particular the injunction to follow the unanimous opinion of the Fathers of the Church. However, mindful of the remarks of Augustine, he added that if the heliocentric theory were ever proved to be true, the interpretation of the Bible would have to be re-examined. By proof he meant certain knowledge through causes, a definition also accepted by Galileo. Bellarmine doubted whether such a proof would ever be found, whereas Galileo knew on other grounds that the heliocentric theory is correct.

In January 1616 Galileo asked Cardinal Orsini to present to the Pope a new proof of the Copernican theory; this was probably his theory of the tides. The Pope decided that it was high time the whole matter was settled, and asked the Holy Office to investigate. A group of consultors was appointed and asked to consider the following propositions.

1. That the sun is the centre of the world and completely immobile of local motion.
2. That the earth is not the centre of the world, nor is it immobile, but it moves as a whole and also with diurnal motion.

The Consultors met on 24 February 1616 and unanimously decided that the first proposition is 'foolish and absurd in philosophy, and formally heretical inasmuch as it expressly contradicts the doctrine of Holy Scripture in many passages, both in their literal meaning and according to the general meaning of the Fathers and learned Doctors'. Concerning the second proposition they 'unanimously agreed that it merited the same censure in philosophy, and that concerning theological truth it was at least erroneous in the faith'. Galileo was not mentioned so the proceedings were a trial of some of his ideas rather than of Galileo himself<sup>15</sup>.

A notable feature of the Galileo case, in particular the proceedings in 1616, is the contrast between the certainty of the theologians that the Aristotelian geocentric theory is correct, and the certainty of Galileo that it is false. This is not because they held different views on Biblical interpretation since both were committed to Catholic exegetical principles going back to

Augustine and Aquinas, supplemented by the writings of seventeenth century theologians such as Pereira, and reiterated by the decrees of the Council of Trent. Galileo accepted the principle of the Council that the interpretation unanimously accepted by the Fathers of the Church must be followed, unless there is an absolutely conclusive scientific proof of a contrary interpretation.

Why was Galileo so sure that he was right, and the consultors appointed by the Holy Office to judge two principles culled from Galileo's writings so sure that he was wrong?

The reasons may be found in the mindset of the consultors and in the twofold nature of scientific proof. The consultors were theologians trained in the theology of Aquinas that was thoroughly integrated with Aristotelian cosmology. The synthesis of Aristotle had stood for two millennia, accounted in a qualitative way for all natural phenomena and was congruent with Catholic beliefs. In particular, it agreed with biblical references to the motion of the sun around the earth. To them it was simply inconceivable that Galileo, simply by looking through a little tube with lenses at either end, could overthrow this majestic synthesis. It did not take them long to decide that Galileo's views were absurd and indeed heretical.

Yet Galileo knew that they were wrong. He had seen a great truth and wanted to tell the world about it. And they refused to listen.

Galileo was not given the opportunity to explain to the consultors the reasons for his conviction of the truth of heliocentrism. Even if he had, it is doubtful that he could fit his new insight into the Procrustian Aristotelian criterion of certain knowledge through causes. As we have seen, the argument cannot be put into strict logical form; all he could say would be that if they looked at things in his way, all becomes clear. But most of the consultors were not familiar with the astronomical discoveries that had been made, and even if he had told them he could never have brought them to see things in his way. They lacked not only knowledge but also the physicist's intuitive sense of the nature of motion and the elasticity of mind to see things in the new way.

After the decision of the Consultors had been published, Bellarmine told Galileo that he should no longer hold these propositions. A document saying that Galileo was forbidden even to write or to speak about the heliocentric theory was later found in the file, but it was not properly endorsed and so could have been simply a draft that was never used. Nevertheless it became known and led to rumours that Galileo had been forbidden even to discuss the theory. Galileo therefore went to Bellarmine and obtained from him a written document dated 26 May 1616 assuring him that he could continue to discuss heliocentrism as a hypothesis.

We can get some idea of what Galileo thought about all this by a section in his letter to the Grand Duchess Christina where he refers to ‘theologians whom I regard as men of profound learning and of the holiest lifestyle’ whom he holds ‘in high esteem and reverence’. He then expresses concern that they seem ‘in disputes about natural phenomena to claim the right to force others by means of the authority of Scripture to follow the opinion they think most in accord with its statements, and at the same time they think that they are not obliged to answer observations and reasons to the contrary’. He adds that ‘officials and experts in theology should not arrogate to themselves the authority to issue decrees in professions that they neither exercise nor study’<sup>16</sup>. Such remarks are likely to infuriate the theologians, and they could well reply that Galileo was interfering in theology. To this Galileo could reply that though he was not a theologian he took care to study the theological arguments and that he was forced to defend himself against unprovoked attacks by theologians.

What can we say about the decision of the consultors? They were conscious of their heavy responsibility to defend the Bible from interpretations that might cause difficulties for the faithful. They were bound by the decrees of the Council of Trent that stipulated that the unanimous opinions of the Fathers of the Church must be followed unless there was conclusive evidence to the contrary. They held that the Bible does contain truths about the natural world, and that these truths must be in accord with the scientific evidence. All these beliefs about the interpretation of the Bible were also held by Galileo. The only difference, and it was a vital one, was that the consultors believed that the geocentric theory is scientifically correct, whereas Galileo was convinced that it is false. He could not convey to them the reasons for his certitude because there were no scientists among them who could understand him. The mindset of the learned and well-intentioned consultors made it impossible for them to understand that Copernicus and Galileo had made a great discovery that would irrevocably change our whole view of the universe and ultimately destroy the Aristotelian cosmology for ever. The only way Galileo could convince them was by a direct proof but the one he emphasised most strongly, that from the tides, is incorrect. Thus on the basis of the principles of interpretation held by both the consultors and by Galileo, and taking into account the limitations of the consultors’ knowledge, they acted correctly. We now see, of course, that the decision was wrong. It is doubtless deplorable that eminent philosophers and theologians make mistakes, but their views must be distinguished from official Church decisions.

Could this tragedy have been avoided? We can never know. But

certainly it was a mistake not to include among the consultants some experienced astronomers who could appreciate what Galileo was trying to say. A more fundamental mistake was to set up a committee to judge a purely scientific question, which the Church should never do.

## **SUBSEQUENT DEVELOPMENTS**

After the events of 1616 Galileo continued his researches and wrote an account of them in a book called *The Assayer* where he expounded his concept of scientific method. While he could not advocate Copernicanism directly, he felt free to say how science should be done, knowing that eventually this would demolish Aristotelian physics and confirm the heliocentric theory of the solar system.

Just before *The Assayer* was published, Galileo's friend Cardinal Matteo Barberini was elected Pope, and took the name Urban VIII. There was just time to dedicate the book to him. As soon as it was published it was read at the Pope's table, to his great pleasure. Galileo was naturally optimistic that better times lay ahead, and he hoped that it would be possible to persuade the Pope to take a more favourable view of Copernicanism. He decided to visit Rome again, and arrived on 23 April 1623. He had a very friendly audience with the Pope and received many marks of favour, but in the end he was told that although Copernicanism had not been condemned as heretical it was still rash and would never be proved true. So the decision of 1616 still stood, but Galileo nevertheless thought that he had sufficient encouragement to write a book comparing the systems of Ptolemy and Copernicus, and including his theory of the tides. He decided to write this in the form of a dialogue between an Aristotelian called Simplicio and a supporter of Copernicanism called Salviati, with Sagredo as Chairman. Simplicio, named after a sixth-century commentator on Aristotle, presented the arguments against Copernicanism, and these are answered by Salviati. In this way Galileo was able to give his arguments in favour of Copernicanism without explicitly committing himself to them. He included an argument suggested to him by the Pope to the effect that whatever arguments there were in favour of Copernicanism, it was always possible that God had made the world in another way; unwisely, he put it in the mouth of Simplicio.

Galileo knew that he had many enemies, and that the injunction of 1616 not to defend or hold the Copernican system was still in force. Nevertheless he was held in high regard by the Pope and he thought that this was a favourable time to show why he believed Copernicanism to be true and wrote the

Dialogue for this purpose. On 29 October 1629 he wrote to his friend Elia Diodati:

‘I have taken up work again on the Dialogue...it will provide, I trust, a most ample confirmation of the Copernican system’<sup>17</sup>.

As required by the censor, he inserted strong disclaimers at the beginning and end of the work, and also obtained an official imprimatur. Following the accepted procedure he therefore submitted the book to the ecclesiastical censor in Rome for a licence. As the outbreak of plague interrupted correspondence, he obtained permission to have the book censored and published in Florence, on condition that some stipulated changes were made. When it was published, the book included the Roman imprimatur as well as the Florentine; this was technically incorrect, as the Roman imprimatur should only appear on books published in Rome. Thus it seemed to him that he had done all that could be reasonably expected to clear the way to publication.

## **THE TRIAL AND CONDEMNATION**

When the book appeared in 1632, it was soon evident that whatever Galileo had said by way of disclaimers, it was in fact a strong argument for the Copernican system. Although the Pope was personally well-disposed towards Galileo he felt that he had been tricked by a friend he had trusted, and was angry that his favourite argument had been put in the mouth of Simplicio. As a patron of learning he would have liked to be lenient towards Galileo but it was a difficult time for the Church and due to the Protestant Reformation he had to defend strongly the integrity of Scripture, which was far more important than any scientific speculation. He therefore appointed a special commission to examine the book and the events leading to its publication. The commission reported that in many places the book supported Copernicanism, and that therefore Galileo seems to have disobeyed the injunction of 1616 not to hold or defend it. The book was then referred to the Inquisition, and Galileo summoned to Rome for interrogation. The main question was whether Galileo had disobeyed the injunction of 1616, and this was considered to be the case. It was further considered that he had deceived the censors, although they were also blamed for not taking their task sufficiently seriously.

Galileo was still held in high regard, and the judges at his trial were discomfited when Galileo produced the document given to him by Cardinal Bellarmine in 1616. In addition, they did not want to offend the Grand Duke of Tuscany. Nevertheless, they could not overlook his disobedience and so they decided to try to arrange what we would now call an out-of-court settlement. To do this, the Commissary General met Galileo privately and suggested that if

he recanted his views he would be treated leniently. However, the Pope considered that he had been tricked by Galileo and insisted on a more definite statement. Galileo asked for time to compose his statement, and this was granted. He then made a public statement abjuring the false opinion that the sun is the centre of the world and immovable and that the earth is not the centre of the world and moves. He was then sentenced to detention in his villa in Arcetri near Florence. It is notable that the document giving the sentence was signed by only seven of the ten cardinals present. Those who did not sign included the Pope's nephew Cardinal Barberini, one of the most powerful men in Rome after the Pope himself.

One could well ask whether Galileo perjured himself by publicly renouncing a belief that he held to be true. Even allowing that his main object by then was to terminate the whole distasteful affair as soon as possible, it is possible to argue that his action was justified because according to the Aristotelian criterion of truth, which he accepted, no indubitable proof of the earth's motion had been found and that therefore the interpretation held by the Church Fathers had to stand.

During his stay in Rome, Galileo was well treated; before the trial he lived in the villa of the Tuscan ambassador and during it in a suite of rooms provided by the Inquisition. He was looked after by his servant, and had a well-stocked cellar. On his way back to Florence, he stayed for some weeks in Siena in the custody of his old friend Archbishop Piccolomini, who welcomed him warmly and was astonished at the way he had been treated. He did much to restore Galileo's morale, and encouraged him to take up his scientific work once more.

Anyone inclined to sit in judgement on the Galileo case from the standpoint of the enlightened twentieth century should bear in mind the treatment of Oppenheimer in the USA and of Vavilov in the Soviet Union. Critics of the behaviour of the cardinals who condemned Galileo would do well to compare his punishment with that imposed on John Fisher by Henry VIII.

## **GALILEO'S REHABILITATION**

One of the major documents of the Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, regretted that in the past some Christians did not show themselves sufficiently aware of the legitimate autonomy of science', and during the Council it was suggested that Galileo should be rehabilitated. Subsequently, in an Address to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences in November 1979, Pope

John Paul II admitted that Galileo ‘had much to suffer – we cannot disguise it – from the representative and institutions of the Church’. He continued:

‘I want theologians, scientists and historians, animated by a desire for honest collaboration, to deepen their study of the Galileo case, and in frank recognition of wrongs done, from whichever side they may have come, to remove the barriers to a fruitful relation of science and faith that the Galileo affair still raises in many minds. I give my wholehearted support to that effort which could honour the truth of faith and science alike, and open the door to their future collaboration’.

Furthermore, he endorsed the principles concerning the interpretation of Scripture expounded in Galileo’s letter to the Grand Duchess Christina.

In response to the Pope’s initiative, a Commission consisting of four study groups was established in July 1982 to study science and epistemology, exegesis, history and culture respectively.

The findings of the Commission were accepted by the Pope in an official ceremony held in 1992. In his address, the Pope ‘noted that the theologians of the Inquisition failed to re-examine their criteria of scriptural interpretation in the context of ‘the new science’. Galileo, ‘a sincere believer’ paradoxically showed himself to be more perceptive’ in his Biblical hermeneutics than the theologians who opposed him’<sup>17</sup>.

The Galileo affair has taught the Church a lesson that we may hope will be never forgotten. As Newman has remarked, ‘that past controversy and its issue have taught me beyond all mistake that men of the greatest theological knowledge may firmly believe that scientific conclusions are contrary to the word of God when they are not so, and pronounce that to be heresy which is truth.

It has taught me that Scripture is not inspired to convey mere secular knowledge, whether about the heavens or the earth or the race of man; and that I need not fear for Revelation, whatever truths may be brought to light by means of observation and experience out of the world of phenomena which environ us<sup>19</sup>.

Acknowledgement: I am grateful to Professor W.E.Carroll for many critical comments and suggestions.

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  - (b) (The sun) has its rising on the edge of heaven, the end of its course is its further edge, and nothing can escape its heat (Psalm 19:6).
  - (c) Like the sun rising over the mountains of the Lord is the beauty of a woman in a well-kept house (Ecclesiasticus 26:16).
  - (d) The sun rises and the sun sets; then to its place it speeds and there it rises (Ecclesiastes 1:5).
  - (e) The sun, at his command, forbears to rise, and on the stars he sets a seal (Job 9:7).
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# Job and the Critique of Unjust Power: Ideologies of Power & the Power of Ideologies

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## INTRODUCTION

The story of Job has been read in many and various ways: as comedy<sup>1</sup>, as horror story<sup>2</sup>, as drama illustrating how God does not seek ‘mute collaborators’<sup>3</sup>, and – more often than not – as examination of human suffering, the inscrutability of God and the failure of conventional theodicy. While not denying the validity of any or all of these approaches, this article is an attempt at a political reading of the Book of Job, a critique of ideology and unjust and arbitrary power: of an insecure king’s misuse of authority over a loyal subject. I am not an exegete, let alone a scholar of Hebrew language. Rather I read the Book of Job as a political and moral fable, a cautionary tale about power and ideology by an ancient Orwell.

Such an approach may seem problematic. Even a highly ‘political’ Hebrew Bible scholar like Norman Gottwald sees Job as an attempt to emphasize the reality of innocent and inexplicable suffering, an attempt ‘to break the grip of a moralism and a dogmatism that was reducing wisdom to canards and formulas about the surface appearances of human life’<sup>4</sup>. My point is to suggest that such ‘canards and formulas’ of ‘wisdom’ might be called ideology, both in the Weberian sense of ‘worldview’ and in the Marxist sense of ‘false consciousness’. Such action is necessarily highly political, an ideological attempt to challenge the dominant discourse of much wisdom literature. Von Rad sees wisdom as ‘practical knowledge of the laws of life and of the world, based on experience.’<sup>5</sup> The problem that needs to be posed is: *whose* knowledge and experience, *what* knowledge and experience? Traditionally, it is held that wisdom literature is derived – at least in part – from comparable sources in Egyptian, Mesopotamian and Canaanite texts. The Book of Job itself has certain similarities to certain Babylonian, Sumerian and

Egyptian texts<sup>6</sup>. Its precise date – like the dating of much wisdom literature as a whole – is uncertain. It *may* be pre-exilic; it may be exilic (with the obvious political association of Israelite oppression under Babylon, the oppression of a vassal state symbolized by Job by a great state, symbolized by God)<sup>7</sup>; it is probably, at least in its final redaction, post-exilic. It might justly be argued, then, that one must read Job with the cultural hindsight of Judaism's ambivalent attitude to human kingship and of the experience of socio-political suffering, *as well as* the conventional approach which focuses on personal tragedy and the inadequacies of a reward-punishment theodicy.

What *is* clear, however, is that the character God is manifested as a King within a royal court. Job is clearly his 'servant' – his subject, not one of the royal (divine) court. In order to interpret the text politically it is therefore necessary to make a few observations about Judaism's understanding of kingship, the metaphor of God as King, and also to further clarify our notions of ideology and power.

## **GOD AND KINGSHIP**

Unlike other Ancient Near Eastern polities that ascribed divine or semi-divine characteristics to monarchy, the Jews drew clear distinctions between divine and human sovereignty. Sacred and civil legitimation of monarchy was strictly separated.<sup>8</sup> The rule of kings came after the rule of priests, prophets and judges. They were endowed with no divine authority; indeed, there was quite a struggle before kingship was even tolerated by the Jews.<sup>9</sup> In fact, 'Israel's monarchy was effectively secular, in that the king could not make a definitive claim to speak on behalf of God'<sup>10</sup>, relying instead on the advice of priests and prophets. Post-exilic Judaism and rabbinic Judaism after the demise of the Jewish state maintained this ambivalence, an ambivalence that persists to the present day.

Secular kings cannot thus be seen as all-wise or in themselves just. They too were subject to God's law and to their duty as warrior-judges to ensure safety against rebellion from within and foreign attack from without. Sometimes, as the story of David makes clear, even good kings subordinated their duty to be just for personal and political interests.<sup>11</sup> Within monarchic Israel, kings had client relationships with the powerful, based on ties of loyalty and patronage. Within this social framework, however, there was nothing like the 'rights culture' that one observes in modern societies.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, one might argue that the notion of the 'just king' was linked to despotism 'because the

rulers were the only persons who had in their power the ability to make final decisions which no one could dispute'. Yet '[i]t was, at the same time, also believed that the rulers would always act as just arbitrators between their subjects'<sup>13</sup>. Israelite kings too, Lemche points out, were also themselves clients of the 'great kings' (the vassalage relationship) and *always* clients of the God of Israel. The significance of such social relations will be fleshed out in our examination of the text of Job.

Moving on to the image of God as King, it should be made clear that though God was certainly accorded royal 'status' within the religious imagery of Israel, it was a status far and beyond that of the monarch. The royal metaphor 'God is king' is in content qualitatively and quantitatively superior to any human king. If divine attributes *originated* as projections of royal attributes, they very clearly also *shaped* the expectations of human kingship. However, these images carefully eschewed any royal trappings or symbols that could tempt pictorial representation of God. Metaphors of divine enthronement, though occasionally used, stressed God's kingship as from eternity until perpetuity. Any attempts to anthropomorphize God were strenuously resisted.<sup>14</sup> It is thus deeply shocking to find such an anthropomorphized image of God in the Book of Job. *Why* such an image – one that I shall argue is deeply flawed – exists must remain a question, perhaps an answer deserving consideration at another time.

## **IDEOLOGY AND HEGEMONY**

Ideology has already been seen as both worldview (Weber) and false consciousness (Marx). These definitions are not in themselves mutually contradictory if one reads the Marxist interpretation as that of a worldview used to legitimate a state of hegemony, where '....the supremacy of a social group manifests itself in two ways, as 'domination' and as 'intellectual' and moral leadership'.<sup>15</sup> A Weberian worldview-ideology may in itself be an expression of a false consciousness, an ideology that legitimates political, economic, social – and indeed religious – power.

Religion is a key element in a society, a key element to be brought into a ruling class' hegemony or Ideological State Apparatus (ISA).

On the ISA, Althusser asserts what he calls a 'duplicate mirror-structure of ideology' which simultaneously ensures:

1. The interpollation of 'individuals' as subjects;
2. Their subjection to the Subject [ie God];

3. The mutual recognition of subjects and Subject, the subjects' recognition of each other, and finally the Subject's recognition of himself [sic];

4. The absolute guarantee that everything really is so, and that on condition that the subjects recognize what they are, and behave accordingly, everything will be all right. Amen – “*So be It*”.’

The individual ‘*is interpolated*’ moreover ‘*as a (free) subject in order that he shall submit freely to the commandments of the Subject*’ i.e. in order that he shall make the gestures and actions of his subject ‘all by himself’. ‘*There are no subjects except by and for their subjection. That is why they “work all by themselves”.*’ Religion is thus a misrepresentation, an ideology, the reproduction of the relations of production and of relations desired for them.<sup>16</sup> As with Religion, so with Monarchy. The ideology of monarchy is both worldview and false consciousness together, tied as it is into the ISA<sup>17</sup>.

It is therefore the contention of this essay that the book of Job can be given a fruitful reading through the means of ‘ideological criticism’<sup>18</sup>, a reading which I shall suggest can point out ideologies of power, the power of ideology and – in the person of Job – their crisis.

## **TOWARDS AN IDEOLOGICAL READING OF THE BOOK OF JOB**

For the purpose of this study I shall accept the full-structure, final narrative unity of Job,<sup>19</sup> not least because that is the *text* – the narrative reality that is different from and greater than its sources, even the author<sup>20</sup> - in which it has been passed on to us. Within it, however, one can clearly see different elements: the framing narrative, the discourses (or dialogues), the discourse on Wisdom (Chapter 28), the Elihu speeches, the Whirlwind discourses of God. Both literarily and structurally the text seems to exude ‘relentless alternation, a primary uncertainty, an essential paradox’<sup>21</sup>.

Within that one can see (argues Jacobson<sup>22</sup>) multiple embedded discourses:

‘Real’ Frame: Authors/Redactors	<u>book</u>	Audience
Prose Frame: God	<u>wager</u>	the Satan
Poetic Frame: Comforters	<u>debate</u>	Job

Within the prose and poetic frames, at least, I would suggest that there is a subtle conflict of ideologies going on between the characters as they seek to redefine themselves vis-a-vis a crisis (which we as readers know is in fact manufactured) in the dominant theodicy. Such a crisis has involved taking on

the different parts of the story (the folktale and the later poem) and giving it a dramatic reworking. As Janzen remarks:

‘Either the prose sections were composed for specific literary effects by the author of the poetry [which is possible, but not probable, see: Dhorme, 1967, for such a defence] or, what amounts to the same thing, the poet adopted (or adapted) for fresh purposes a story extant in some form.’<sup>23</sup>

With this in mind I shall examine the text more closely by dividing it into Frame Narratives (Prologue and Epilogue) and Poetic Discourses.

### **Frame Narrative 1 (Job 1-2): -The Prologue: God’s Wager.**

Habel<sup>24</sup> admirably demonstrates the shifts on the action of the story, from Job on Earth to the Assembly in Heaven to the First Test on Earth to the Second Assembly in Heaven to the Second Test and the Third (this time human) Assembly on Earth. These scenic shifts serve on a literary level as character and plot exposition (both in the narrative and conspiratorial sense) and also on the meta-level as an exposition of the dynamics of power and ideology that are central to the story.

In a move that is deeply subversive theologically, God is presented quite uncharacteristically for Judaism as a deeply insecure and boastful monarch, a gullible figure who is easily won over by his chief advisor on security matters, the Satan.<sup>25</sup>

He is

‘ [a] deity, either poisoned by suspicion or too much like the aged and failing Canaanite El, [who] rules over the divine assembly. The narrative” [we are reminded] “does not simply deal with the integrity of a virtuous hero, but more importantly raises the very question of Yahweh’s power, justice, and moral governance of the world.’<sup>26</sup>

Such dissonance is deeply disturbing, not for its representation of God as King (which we have seen was a common metaphor) but rather for *what kind of king* God seems. If one were to see God as king in Shakespearean terms, a Jewish Shakespeare may well have seen him as Henry V (noble, heroic and triumphant) rather than the Lear figure (weak, malleable and tragically destructive) as he appears here. Such a representation seems to suggest an authorial crisis of faith in existing images of God in the light of Jewish experience of suffering. It might equally be suggested that such crisis of faith could be extended to profound skepticism about the justness and effectiveness of kingship. Assuming the text took shape in a court setting, it

might be speculated that such skepticism has been conflated, with the human critique of royal ideology neatly concealed within a ‘hidden transcript’ of an almost non-Jewish court of Heaven looking at a non-Jewish human subject.<sup>27</sup>

A key issue in the ideological debate between God and the Satan is freedom: does the subject (Job) freely submit to the commandments (faith and worship) of the Subject (God) within the context of the ISA (religion)? The political parallel is implicit: do ‘loyal subjects’ of a monarch express fealty out of real loyalty to monarchy, or is such loyalty contingent upon a monarch’s successful delivery of social benefits like peace and the possibility for personal security and well-being? <sup>28</sup> The Satan’s Machiavellian skepticism plays into the insecurity of his monarch, with the resultant disastrous effects for Job. <sup>29</sup>

What is striking in the Prologue is the way in which Job himself articulates the dominant ISA. Though clearly seeing his sufferings as acts of God (1.20-22; 2.10), and though he is aware that he is not being punished for sin, he submits freely at first to the ‘commands’ of the Subject. Yet as the Prologue draws to a close, he is clearly in great anguish. Though he may accept the reality as it is, though he has behaved as is expected of him as subject of the Subject, everything is *not* all right or as it should be.

### **The Poetic Discourses (Job 3 – 37): Challenging and Defending the Ideological State Apparatus**

Job’s response to his suffering, while never breaking the relationship with God by curse or blasphemy,<sup>30</sup> skirts on the ‘edge of heresy’<sup>31</sup>. His initial discourse, suggests Habel<sup>32</sup>, is both curse (15 incantations against life and creation in general, 3.3-10) and powerful lament (3.11-26). Indeed it is a ‘direct assault against creation itself’<sup>33</sup>. Yet Perdue misses a key point – the clear transition from an incantation of uncreation to a more conventional lament. Job senses, I think, that his attack on creation will lead to blasphemy – his words are already attempts to usurp through ‘magic’ the divine order. As a confused, tortured subject of a seemingly mad King he stops on the brink of rebellion against God/creation. The subject-Subject relationship of the ISA is stretched to its ideological limits, but not broken. The ideology of power is tenuously preserved.

There is simply too much within the ‘dialogues’ between Job and his friends for them to receive the attention to detail they deserve in a paper of this length. Rather it should be noted that they represent a presentation and

refutation of the conventional ‘wisdom’ of the day. A partial and simplistic summary of them<sup>34</sup> might be as follows:

- God is just, and oversees a system of reward for good deeds and punishment for bad (4.9);
- Humanity cannot be more righteous than God (4.17);
- Job’s trouble cannot come from nothing (5.6);
- Job should rely on God, and ask his mercy (5.8);
- God cannot be unjust; perhaps the children of Job sinned (8.3-4);
- God is just; he is likely to have extracted less punishment from Job than warranted by Job’s sins (11.6-7);
- God is inscrutable; Job cannot fathom his mystery (11.6-7);
- Job is arrogant for claiming to be innocent when his punishments indicate his guilt (15.4);
- Why should God punish Job if he is righteous? Job must have done something (22.2-9).

All these claims represent orthodoxy. They are expressions of conventional wisdom: that suffering is a result of sin, that wisdom and righteousness leads to life while folly or wickedness leads to ruin. That these friends, who have hitherto thought (correctly) that Job was a just and righteous man, now articulate these positions is a prime example of the hegemonic power of ideologies over human reasoning.

Faced with the finality of death ( Job 8-10) and the injustice of his affliction in the light of the dominant theological ideology of reward for goodness and divine approbation, Job (quite reasonably) sees God as his enemy. Refusing to feign sorrow for things he did not commit (which would be the logical action of one totally trapped within the religious/ political ISA) he asserts his humanity. Though bound up within a system of disease, physical corruption and ultimately servant to an ‘alien divine design’, ‘victims of a post-birth determination of fate by a divine dictator’.<sup>35</sup> Job’s protest becomes the assertion of a kingly humanity that refuses to give in, even if his kingdom is the simple one of dust, ‘earthiness’. Here, by asserting kingliness in defeat, he challenges a hegemonic ISA of beggardom.<sup>36</sup>

Job’s rejection of such conventional wisdom takes the radical form of a call for a law suit between himself and God (see especially Job 13, 31). Its form he envisions as a rather unconventional *ius civile* form of an international *rîb* covenant violation<sup>37</sup> complete with the defendant’s (Job’s) declaration of innocence rooted in wisdom rather than simply juridic language<sup>38</sup>. Job’s

skepticism of operating even within such ideological conventions is clear in his fear that God would not bother either to respond to such a challenge or that God would simply not play ‘fair’ if he responded. The measure to which Job still operates within the ISA can be seen in the fact that he still hopes, in the face of everything that has happened, that God’s sense of justice would prevail over God’s power.<sup>39</sup>

At this point, let us consider the place of Job 28 within the text. Klaus Westermann<sup>40</sup> points out that it does not correspond to conventional wisdom speech found in the Old Testament and that advances the revolutionary thesis that ‘wisdom cannot be acquired...such control over wisdom is possible only for the creator, never for the creature’<sup>41</sup>. It is almost certainly a late insertion and might be seen as a later attempt at ‘damage limitation’. Penchansky observes that Job’s dissonant voice did not have much long-term effect:

‘When faced with the opportunity to destabilize religious perceptions in the mainstream of Israelite life, most of the religious leadership fled in terror. They banished the voice of skepticism in ancient Israel to the margin of Israelite thought’.<sup>42</sup>

Such a text, while not in itself without problems, seems to be an affirmation of ideological status quo.

### **Replies to Job (32-41)**

The first set of real replies to Job come from Elihu, a young man who appears out of nowhere, somewhat comically, to have all the answers. He may be seen as a prophet figure claiming divine authorization<sup>43</sup> with a name that may be a variation on Elijah, but with a discourse (especially 32.18-20a) that combines excess pomposity for one of such tender years with an enthusiasm that can be likened – in a brilliant piece of *double entendre* – not so much with tempests as with a more common form of wind! He is certainly not the Advocate Job expected or wanted. Rather he puts forward God’s case in terms that are not unlike those that God will use (36.24-37.24).

It is these elements, his speeches and their positioning shortly before God’s, which are interesting. On an ideological level, they might suggest – because he is rather a comic and ineffectual figure, a self-parody of a prophet – an implicit critique of Israel’s prophetic tradition. Janzen notes that post-exilic readers would find much confirmation of the sin-judgment-retribution theology of the prophets. That it is parodied here would suggest unease at such a theology, particularly in the light of the fact that so many innocent people

had suffered.<sup>44</sup> The prophetic element is a problem for any ideological analysis of Scripture. On one hand it represents a rupture of hegemony (particularly where the prophet denounces monarchical injustice, viz Nathan to David); on the other, it still operates within a conventional ideology of power, critiquing (as Job does in most of this text) deviation from the ISA.

God's reply from the whirlwind (Job 37-41) is far more articulate. It amounts to a refusal to conform to human expectations of divine justice and is a multi-layered refutation of conventional theodicy, an expression of the distance (in thought and in power) between God and humanity. God's justice is *not* anthropomorphic and will not conform to human philosophy or theology. The overall effect of the speeches is to affirm that the magnitude of creation – of which humanity is but a part – dwarfs the suffering of individuals like Job. The distance between humans and deity – between subject and Subject – is increased, not decreased, by God's speeches.

This should not, however, leave the reader comforted. For within the 'Real' Frame of the narrative we know that to a certain degree God's stormy presentation is a form of bluster. God is not totally honest to Job. God is evading the question, because all that has happened to Job is not arbitrary but the result of a wager made by a less than omniscient and more than a little paranoid God. God's discourse – all of which is no doubt true – is an exercise in 'spin doctoring' and ideological cover-up.

Job's first response to this should not be seen as absolute submission, a sign of surrender, contrition or satisfaction. Janzen<sup>45</sup> points out that his use of *hen* can mean both 'behold' and 'if'. The textual nuance suggests an intentionally nuanced response, where he can publicly give up his contest with God while maintaining his own counsel. It is also (*pace* Habel<sup>46</sup>) an admission that God is the greater power. That such a position is perceived by God is apparent in God's renewed self-defense (40.6-41.34). This need to gain back absolute power and submission is once again a sign of divine insecurity. It also hints at the need for hegemonic control on the part of any Subject.

## **Frame Narrative 2 (Job 42) – The Epilogue: An Uneasy Restoration**

Although Job reaffirms his silence in the face of God's answer and 'repent[s] of dust and ashes' (42.6), it may at best be a pyrrhic victory for God. In actual fact one might well say "Job has maintained his integrity and Yahweh has lost his."<sup>47</sup>

Job has in fact gained enormous ground against God. God has recognized Job as litigant (40.2) and God has responded – if only to refuse to participate. Job has gained awareness that his sense of cosmic order – the dominant ideology – is false, that (by God’s own admission) that the exercise of power is arbitrary, and that God – the Subject – is beyond the bounds of ruling ideology. God’s loss in all this is considerable. To his credit, perhaps to his redemption, God is forced to admit that Job had spoken rightly and that the ‘orthodoxy’ of Job’s friends was – at least in *this* case – false consciousness.

The restoration that God makes to Job is, to this reader at least, as much a sign of divine embarrassment as it is of divine justice. At no time does God even bother to tell Job the whole story. Yet even with all God’s ‘doubling’ of Job’s fortunes, this reader cannot be wonder whether such material blessing can ever be adequate compensation for loss. How much Job lost – particularly in his loss of illusions about the dominant ideology – may perhaps be seen in a contrast between the opening lines of the text and the final verses. In Job 1.1-5 we see a figure of wealth and piety. In the last lines (42.12-17) we see Job as wealthy and successful once more, even happy. But there are no references to piety.<sup>48</sup>

## **CONCLUSION**

Much more needs to be done on the ideological reading of Job. If anything has been achieved at all, it is perhaps to suggest that a critical *lacuna* exists within Jobian studies.

I have suggested that an ideological reading of Job can be done by examining how characters in the text respond to the ideology of power within a society and to the power of ideologies within their lives.

I would conclude that the Book of Job – in particular Job’s developing insights – suggest a crisis in belief in such ideologies on a number of levels. On one level, within a context of Judaism’s ambivalence to kingship, it would suggest that Job might be read as a profoundly anti-monarchical text. On another (but certainly not unconnected) level, elements of Jobian language and the representation of characters as typological of the Near East might suggest a critique of vassalage between dominant and weak states.

Finally, having tried to put aside temporarily personalistic interpretations, one finds that the personal – which is always political – creeps back. Human suffering (whether overtly political or not) inevitably forces people of faith to address the question of God’s active, passive or absent role.

If anything, we are left profoundly uneasy about the person of God: what if, after all, 'God' in the Book of Job is *not* intended to be a character representing a critique of monarchy? What if, in the face of the experience of exile and the collapse of the older ideas about divine mercy, justice and the outward signs of divine favor, this story is really meant to be a critique of God?

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> . Whedbee, I.W. 1977. The Comedy of Job. *Semeia* (7 ): 1-39.

<sup>2</sup> . Schlobin, R. C. 1992. Prototypic Horror: The Genre of the Book of Job. *Semeia* (60)23-38.

<sup>3</sup> . Schöckell, L.A. 1997. Towards a Dramatic Reading of the Book of Job. *Semeia* ( 7): 45-61.

<sup>4</sup> . Gottwald, N.K. 1985. *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Interpretation* Philadelphia:Fortress Press

<sup>5</sup> . von Rad, G. 1967. *Old Testament Theology* (Volume 1) New York: Harper & Row.

<sup>6</sup> . Beyerlin, W. (ed), 1978. *Near Eastern Religious Texts Relating to the Old Testament*. London: SCM; Lambert, W. G. 1960. *Babylonian Wisdom Literature*. Oxford: Clarendon Press; Pritchard, L.B.(ed). 1950. *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*. Princeton: Princeton University Press; also Pope, M.H. 1973. *Job*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

<sup>7</sup> . Here an interesting exercise might be to see it as a 'hidden transcript' of a critique of oppression. Scott, J.C. 1990. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. New Haven: Yale University Press, points out that a common strategy of dominated communities is to express protest analogically, frequently 'speaking truth to power' through the use of humour, drama and fantasy that appears on the surface innocuous, but is often deeply subversive of power.

<sup>8</sup> . Mettinger, T D. N. 1976. *King and Messiah: The Civil and Sacred Legitimation of Israelite Kings*. Lund: C W K Gleerup.

<sup>9</sup> . Polish, D. 1989. *Give Us A King (legal-Religious Sources of Jewish Sovereignty)*. Hoboken, NJ: Ktav; Halpern, B. 1981. *The Constitution of the Monarchy in Israel*. Chico, CA: Scholars Press.

<sup>10</sup> Halpern, *Constitution* , p. xxii

<sup>11</sup> For an examination see: Whitelam, K. W. 1979. *The Just King: Monarchical Judicial Authority in Ancient Israel*. Sheffield: JSOT Press.

- <sup>12</sup>. Knight, D. A. 1994. Political Rights and Powers in Monarchic Israel. *Semeia* (66): 93-117.
- <sup>13</sup>. As argued by Lemche, N. P. 1994. Kings and Clients: On Loyalty Between the Rulers and the Ruled in Ancient "Israel". *Semeia* (66):129.
- <sup>14</sup>. As shown by Brettler, M. Z. 1989. *God is King: Understanding an Israelite Metaphor*. Sheffield: JSOT Press.
- <sup>15</sup>. Gramsci, A. 1971. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. London: Lawrence & Wisharti.
- <sup>16</sup>. Althusser, L. 1971. *Lenin and Philosophy, and other essays*. New York: Monthly Review Press: 181-183, as punctuated and italicized in the original.
- <sup>17</sup>. It may be objected that the use of such notions as Marxism in understanding Old Testament studies is anachronistic. To some, this may be because the Marxist historical project came to an end in 1989. To others from *within* the Marxist paradigm, it might be claimed that it is inappropriate to apply Marxist theory - theory about 19th and 20th Century capitalism - to an ancient, monarchical society. In reply it should be noted that Marxist analysis *has* been used (to my mind quite fruitfully) in Greco-Roman scholarship (cf St. Croix) and indeed within Biblical scholarship (Belo, Clevenot, Schotroff, Stegemann, and in particular Gottwald). Even today, one finds liberal and social democratic scholars retrieving (whether explicitly or implicitly) Marxism from its authoritarian political past in order to critique the excesses of an uncontrollable, possibly self-destructive, capitalism.
- <sup>18</sup>. Bible and Culture Collective. 1995. *The Postmodern Bible*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- <sup>19</sup>. Seitz, C. R. 1989. Full-Structure, Movement and Interpretation. *Interpretation* (43): 5-17.
- <sup>20</sup>. Here I accept Michel Foucault's observations about the limits of authorship 'What is an Author' in Foucault, M. 1984. *The Foucault Reader* (ed) Paul Rabinow. New York: Pantheon: 101-120]. His observations in a field like biblical studies, where authorship is often unclear or disputed, seem particularly useful.
- <sup>21</sup>. Jacobson, R. 1981. Satanic Semiotics, Jobian Jurisprudence. *Semeia* (19).
- <sup>22</sup>. Ibid., p.65.
- <sup>23</sup>. Janzen, J. G. 1985. *Job*. Atlanta: John Knox Press.
- <sup>24</sup>. Habel, N. 1985. *The Book of Job*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press
- <sup>25</sup>. Anthony Ceresko describes the Satan as holding "the office similar to a modern public prosecutor or chief of government intelligence service, the CIA

or KGB, for example." See: Ceresko, A. R. 1999. *Introduction to Old Testament Wisdom: A Spirituality for Liberation*. Mumbai: St Pauls

<sup>26</sup> . Perdue, L. G. 1991. *Wisdom in Revolt: Metaphorical Theology in the Book of Job*. Decatur, GA: Almond Press.

<sup>27</sup> . We read that Job is of 'the land of Uz' (1. 1), *not* of Israel or Judah. His friends, too, are not Jewish. Yet they are distinctly monotheistic. What we see perhaps is an example of geographical dissonance put at the service of allegory, not unlike the political allegory of the USA in L Frank Baum's 'children's' fables of Oz.

<sup>28</sup> . Articulated less politically but in a similar sense in Janzen, *Job*, p.39.

<sup>29</sup> . To draw a parallel from modern US history, it would be interesting to compare the mentalities and roles of God and the Satan with the professional relationship between former President Richard Nixon and his Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. (Or, indeed, between George W Bush and his security advisors Donald Rumsfeld, Condeleeza Rice and Paul Wolfowitz.)

<sup>30</sup> . He has already rebuked his wife for his proposal "Curse God and die" (2.9-10).

<sup>31</sup> . Freedman, D. N. 1988. Is It Possible to Understand the Book of Job? *Bible Review* (April):26-33,44.

<sup>32</sup> . Habel, *op cit*, pp.106-112.

<sup>33</sup> . Perdue, L. G. 1987. Job's Assault on Creation. *Hebrew Annual Review* (10)3 12.

<sup>34</sup> .Based on Sharkansky, I. 1996. *Israel and Its Bible: A Political Analysis*. New York: Garland.

<sup>35</sup> . Habel, *op cit*, pp.382,389.

<sup>36</sup> . Here let me express surprise, and disagreement, at Katherine Dell's assertion that "there is no attribution to any king, actual or implicit, in the book of Job." Dell, K.J. 1998. The King in Wisdom Literature, In Day, J. (ed), 1998. *King and Messiah in Israel and the Ancient Near East* Sheffield: JSOT Press.

<sup>37</sup> . Once again we find an *international* metaphor, a suggestion perhaps that one of the underlying issues within the book is unjust covenantal state relations. This element would resonate well with post-exilic Judaism. See: Roberts, J. M. 1977. Job and the Israelite Religious Tradition. *ZAW* (89):111; Dick, M. B. 1979. The Legal Metaphor in Job 31. *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* ( 41): 37-50.

<sup>38</sup> . Dick, M. B. 1983. Job 31, the Oath of Innocence, and the Sage. *ZAW* (95): 31-53.

<sup>39</sup>. A modern historical parallel can be seen in the aspirations of ordinary workers and peasants in the 1905 Russian Revolution, who still believed that the Tsar would act justly. Less naive revolutionaries like Lenin and Trotsky gleefully recount how these aspirations were shattered on the bayonets of the Russian Army.

<sup>40</sup>. Westermann, K. 1981. *The Structure of the Book of Job*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press. Ibid, p. 137.

<sup>42</sup>. PENCHAVSKY, D. 1990. *The Betrayal of God: Ideological Conflict in Job*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press.

<sup>43</sup>. Janzen, *Job*, p.217.

<sup>44</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>. Ibid, p.243.

<sup>46</sup>. Habel, *Book of Job* , p. 549

<sup>47</sup>. PENCHANSKY, *Betrayal of God*, p.55.

<sup>48</sup>. For this reason I find Gustavo Gutierrez's observation that "[o]nly when we come to realise that God's *love* is freely bestowed do we enter fully and definitively into the presence of the God of *faith*" [my italics in both cases] misguided in this particular case. See: Gutierrez, G. 1987. *On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent*. New York: Orbis.

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## **ABOUT ST AUGUSTINE COLLEGE OF SOUTH AFRICA**

The idea of founding a Catholic university in South Africa was first mooted in 1993 by a group of academics, clergy and business people. It culminated in the establishment of St Augustine College of South Africa in July 1999, when it was registered by the Minister of Education as a private higher education institution and started teaching students registered for the degree of Master of Philosophy and Doctor of Philosophy.

It is situated in Victory Park, Johannesburg and operates as a university offering values-based education to students of any faith or denomination, to develop leaders in Africa for Africa.

The name 'St Augustine' was chosen in order to indicate the African identity of the College since St Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD) was one of the first great Christian scholars of Africa.

As a Catholic educational institution, St Augustine College is committed to making moral values the foundation and inspiration for all its teaching and research. In this way it offers a new and unique contribution to education, much needed in our South African society.

It aims to be a community that studies and teaches disciplines that are necessary for the true human development and flourishing of individuals and society in South Africa. The College's engagement with questions of values is in no sense sectarian or dogmatic but is both critical and creative. It will explore the African contribution to Christian thought and vice versa. Ethical values will underpin all its educational programmes in order to produce leaders who remain sensitive to current moral issues.

The college is committed to academic freedom, to uncompromisingly high standards and to ensuring that its graduates are recognised and valued anywhere in the world. Through the international network of Catholic universities and the rich tradition of Catholic tertiary education, St Augustine College has access to a wide pool of eminent academics, both locally and abroad, and wishes to share these riches for the common good of South Africa.