Postscript: What's Not Here

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The argument of *Where Now* was incomplete in some respects. There were things I did not know, and some I did not even know that I did not know. Some of those gaps can be sketched, and some have been partially filled in in the years since I published *Where Now* (2006). This brief account will probably be changed before it comes to any final form, so treat it as a preliminary inquiry. Ideally, *Where Now* should be given a second edition with this postscript amended in that book, but that may take some time. To take into account all that was left out would mean turning it from a deconstruction of creationism to a full-fledge exposition of the doctrine of creation, and that is probably beyond my means.

The principal lacuna is the structure of chapter 8 on acts of God as it was published in 2006. I think I knew a little of what was missing, but not enough to risk speculating about it then. Chapter 8 lacks all that later came in *Living in Spin*, which is devoted to the structure of action as such, taking human action as its primary example. Even *Living in Spin* leaves room for more explanation, and it gave acts of God only a page or so,[1] and that only restated the problem without exploring it in any depth.

Eventually it came to me that a method could be borrowed from the definition of Chalcedon in Christology and applied to the presence of transcendence, including acts of God, more generally (after *Where Now*? before? I don't know). Briefly stated, the transcendent and immanent features of any phenomenon are both present whole and intact and without interfering with each other. The mundane works as it always does, and among its presuppositions one eventually comes to unanswerable questions, and those questions are the entry to transcendence. How is one to speak of the presence of transcendence? Usually, we speak of it precisely as interfering with immanent, intramundane phenomena. Hence a radical irony. Such language is figurative, and to take it literally is to objectivate what

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[1] *Living in Spin*, section 5.3.2, "Acts of Nature, Acts of God."

it speaks of. The language of transcendence is also analogical instead of univocal: irony again. Biblical religion is not for the irony-challenged, but it is usually marketed to the irony-challenged anyway. To walk in the way of faith is to allow that irony to unfold in one's life and the world around us.

One issue in dispute between theology and creationism is objectivation. Objectivation is a genus that begins with visible images, idols, as one species. Other species are argumentative apologetics, so-called "proofs," analytic philosophy of religion, and the domestication of transcendence. Objectivation has appeared in the books since *Where Now*.[2] The issue is objectivation *of persons*, which is pathological. Objectivation of things, as in physics, does not seem to have problems, but that is a question for philosophy of physics, not philosophy of religion. To objectivate another person is to bracket the essential challenge that comes with knowing *and being known by* another person. That may be for purposes of mistreating the other. Another motive could be evading the risks that come with letting the other know me. In regard to God, objectivation blunts the challenge of the Almighty, it protects the believer from God, and it domesticates transcendence. Indeed, it domesticates God, denials to the contrary notwithstanding. Why the older contributors to the Common Documents reacted so vehemently to objectivation in the form of idols is a puzzle in the history of religions and the genesis of radical monotheism that I do not know how to solve. It was a breakthrough insight.

Creationisms all seem to assume variations of the design argument, wherein organisms are taken to be artifacts (cf. William Paley), thereby "proving" the so-called "existence" of the artificer. There are many ways of objectivating the "existence" of God, and the design argument is only one of them. Why choose the design argument instead of one of the others? Because the real presence of the designer comes from the fact of the designed artifact, and the root motive of creationism is to secure the presence of God. The goal, the presence of God, appears in many places in theology, but let me name only one, the Psalms, many of which cry out to God for his presence with us. They are so plaintive precisely because the presence of transcendence in the immanent world is not objective, and it is fragile and precarious. To *secure* the presence of God is another matter: doing that is a form of objectivating God, and the relationship of the community of faith and of believers in it to God is precisely *not* something that can be secured. To secure that relationship is to get control over it, and that is what creatures do not have. People and animals in Gary Larson's *Far Side* cartoons are creatures, and

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[2]*The Accountant's Tale*, sections 1.5, 5.2, 6.1, 6.3, 7.4 to 7.6, 8.5, 9.4, and passim. *Unanswerable Questions*, sections 5.2 to 5.6 and passim.

Larson excels at showing us their frailty. Creaturehood here is an concept from theological anthropology, not from creationism. It is about the nature of persons and personhood, not about the natural history of life on earth.

Søren Kierkegaard in *Sickness Unto Death* opens by observing that a self is a relationship that relates itself to itself, but is constituted as such by an Other. Other-relatedness is built in from the beginning, and we interpersonate in everything we do. The creationist design argument appears to give us what Kierkegaard offers, but by naturalistic means, and therefore with domestication built in by that naturalization. Intramundane other-relatedness to ordinary other persons is easy enough to see, but relating to a transcendent Other is a matter of faith. We still interpersonate after all other persons in this world or any other have done all they can for us; in that sense, we cry out (as in the Psalms) to ultimate reality as to a person. We interpersonate toward ultimate reality even though ultimate reality is not simply a personal being. This was broached in *Basic Concepts*, chapter 6, and developed in *Living in Spin*, in *The Accountant's Tale*, and especially in *Unanswerable Questions*, but it was not yet patent in *Where Now*.

The presence of God is simply presupposed; it cannot be demonstrated objectively, but it can be experienced in the life of faith. Running through debates about creatonism and its quest for objectivation is an unwillingness to recognize that faith is a choice, not the result of any kind of inference. This point was labored in many places in *The Accountant's Tale* and assumed in its companion books. I had not made an issue of it in the predecessors to *Where Now*.

Naturalization is the most common way to objectvation simply because the natural is always objective. A premodern alternative to naturalizing God would be John Damascene and his tradition.[3] He deftly removes God from among beings and conceives of him as beyond being. It would be a misunderstanding of Damascene to take that as still reifying and objectivating God but doing so by parking the Deity in someplace other than the ensemble of beings. Fending off that mistake would take more work, and it would be a task in the criticism of Neoplatonism, not the criticism of creationism.

Martin Heidegger is prominent in *Where Now*, but he mostly grounds the distinction between personal being and tool (designed) being. Sometime, I think before I wrote *Where Now*, I spotted the mistake on page 12 of *Sein und Zeit*, and

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[3]See *Unanswerable Questions*, p. 96–97. Note that the pertinent philosophical tradition today does not always agree with John Damascene wholesale; some thomists would nuance the reading of his work carefully. See Gregory Rocca, *Speaking the Incomprehensible God; Thomas Aquinas on the Interplay of Positive and Negative Theology*, Catholic University of America Press, 2004, p. 355 and passim.

correcting it extended the horizon of personal being to include all the interpersonal relations that any person necessarily has. It appeared in *Living in Spin*, chapter 3, and in everybook since then. It needs a phenomenology that I am not yet able to give it, and it should figure prominently in any exposition of the relations between God and creatures. Maybe some day.

The root cause of creationism is anxiety, and the goal is to evade anxiety. Arguing with creationists is frustrating because they induce anxiety in any adversaries who do not know enough to see them as ridiculous.[4] Often the key to deflating creationism is to spot the fatal assumptions that are asserted by presupposition rather than spelled out explicitly. (That is an ability to see (or hear) what's not there. . . .) I don't think my efforts were definitive, and some creationists still induce anxiety in me, just as the Nazgul did to Frodo and others in *Lord of the Rings*. That is not to call creationists Nazgul,[5] it is merely to point out that without knowing what they are doing, creationists take advantage of a simple feature of human personhood. In any argument when one person is anxious, that anxiety can couple to and induce a counter-anxiety in the other party. Unstated presuppositions in an argument easily induce anxiety in the adversary, and they are most effective when the faulty presuppositions are unknown even to their proponents.

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[4]The chief of the Nazgul is deflated only when, after he has proudly claimed that no man can harm him, Eowyn replies, in effect, "Silly boy! I am no man, I am a woman!" I take the plural of Nazgul to be just Nazgul; cf. the Wictionary, the Wikipedia, and other sources on the Net.

[5]They are, after all, hoping and attempting to be faithful Christians.