

Ordinality and the Divine Natures

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Introduction

Philosophical theology continues to be plagued by a lack of insight concerning its basic conceptual resources and a consequent inability to provide a compelling portrayal of the divine natures. On one side, process theology has extended and refined the categories of experience, event, and divine evolution, but has not been able to shed sufficient light on the ways in which the divine is embedded in the orders of nature. The implied panpsychism of Whitehead and Hartshorne privileges the traits of finite experience and overestimates the scope of psychic traits in nature. At the other philosophic extreme are those thinkers, enamored by the alleged free space provided by postmodernism, who reject all conceptual strategies that do not devolve into metaphors. Metaphoric language is held to free theology from the more difficult and prolonged process of validation. While the shift to metaphor, and the attendant elevation of aesthetic language, seems to advance philosophical theology, it actually masks a deeper theoretical impoverishment. Neither process theology nor the more recent metaphorical strategies contain sufficient categorial richness to sustain a generic exploration and articulation of the divine natures.

It does not follow from this that process thought will not continue to provide some of the concepts needed for a more generic articulation of the divine. Nor is it denied that metaphoric language can often enhance the richness and evocative power of a conceptual portrayal. What does follow is that process categories need to be located within a more generic perspective that does not privilege consciousness and its contingent features. Further, metaphoric language must be shown to serve extrametaphoric interests. The creative tension between categorial articulation and metaphoric expression remains central to the present task.

Throughout this paper, a number of key concepts of ordinal metaphysics are employed to create a more adequate way of understanding the divine natures. At several key junctures in the analysis it will be necessary to reconstruct or even reject some of the features of the ordinal perspective.

Buchler did not create a detailed conception of the divine even though he provided a metaphysical framework that makes such a conception possible. I am persuaded that one of the most important tests of any philosophic perspective is its ability to probe into the various dimensions of God. At the same time, any philosophic encounter with God may put creative pressure back on the very categories used to explore the divine. We do not simply fit God into an antecedent framework. There are striking senses in which God will be an exception to any basic conceptual perspective. While Buchler would reject the notion that God violates some aspects of ordinality, he sets the tone for my exploration as follows:

Nothing jeopardizes the strong uniqueness of this complex [i.e., God]. Historically and persistently, there attaches to it a customary formal scheme of traits. This scheme, adhered to in its essentials by widely differing philosophers, serves to maintain a level of gravity and primacy for the idea of God. It predetermines the complex to be interpreted, however different the interpretations otherwise may be. It provides the "rules" with which all versions are to accord. Thus men have recognized in effect that to God belongs great pervasiveness, inexhaustible value as a paradigm, symbolic richness, "supremacy." Such traits prescribe the sphere of relevance, the formula as it were, for ceaseless translation of the idea. Translation presupposes an "original;" so that when a philosopher wishes to use and adapt the concept of God, but fails to grasp the sense of the schematic requirement and fails to grasp the compulsion behind it, he achieves not the metaphysical or poetic perception he might have sought, but a somewhat hollow categorial freedom.¹

It is important to note that ordinal metaphysics can facilitate more than one conception of God. Any given portrayal of the divine natures represents one "translation of the idea," and must establish its claims to adequacy through its ability to become relevant to all the dimensions of religious experience. Further, such a portrayal must remain in creative tension with traditional conceptions of God and provide mechanisms for moving past and through perspectives that continue to remain compelling. The current enterprise is ultimately concerned with reshaping Christian theology so that it can free itself from some of its idiosyncratic and nongeneric commitments and thereby liberate Christology from a provincial and self-serving perspective.

The Dimensions Of Nature

If we assume that God is in process then it follows that the divine is in some sense finite and in need of further growth and self-articulation. In

this protracted process of self-expansion, God overcomes its previous limitations and moves toward a more complete state. While process theologians, in acknowledging the growth of the divine, distinguish between the primordial and the consequent natures of God, it is necessary to transform their perspective to clarify more precisely those ways in which God is located in nature and the orders of history. More importantly, it is necessary to examine the respects in which the divine is eclipsed by a reality that provides the goad and lure for its own eternal self-surpassing. In what follows, I delineate four divine dimensions and contrast them to more traditional formulations. This entails a redefinition of trinitarian structures along the lines of this four-fold analysis. My ultimate objective is to show that there are conceptual impulses within Christianity that provide an Encompassing perspective within which Christianity can be relocated and redefined. Process theology, with all of its innovations, has only explored and refined several of these impulses.

To say that God is in some respect finite is to affirm the sheer locatedness of God in the innumerable orders of nature. Nature, as itself without an outer circumference or ultimate contour, is in many respects a more encompassing reality than God. It makes no sense to say that nature is some sort of "collection" of individuals or that it is bound by an eternal outer limit within which all complexes prevail. It is more compelling to understand nature as without any limitations or extrinsic framework. This is not to say, however, that nature is completely bereft of observable aspects. There are two fundamental dimensions to nature, as noted by Buchler. The first is *natura naturata* or nature natured. In this dimension we can speak of nature or world as the "sum" of all complexes. While it is impossible to enumerate and encompass these complexes, it is important to recognize that nothing can prevail that is not a complex in relation to other complexes. While a given complex may have more scope or comprehensiveness than another, it will still be located and limited by other complexes. The second dimension of nature is *natura naturans* or nature in its naturing. In this dimension, nature lives as the protean and active source for all of the complexes in the first dimension. The innumerable complexes manifest as nature natured are themselves located and ordered by the sheer power of nature in its naturing. In the words of Buchler:

If *natura naturata* is "the world" or "the Universe," then *natura naturans* is the order of provision and determination. It is reflected in the fertility of any complex whatever. Nature is not so much the order which contains or even includes all other orders as the order which permeates them all; not the order within which but by which new orders are discriminable and explorable, whether through assertion,

action, or contrivance. Only such an order can make possible and justify the indefinite continuation of query. (MNC 100)

This fundamental distinction will function as the basic categorial structure that enables us to articulate the four divine natures. Nature in its naturing permeates the divine orders as well as the nondivine and lives as the sheer "providingness" of the innumerable complexes of the world.

Invoking more traditional language, we can see nature natured as equivalent to the orders of creation. These orders have a certain autonomy from the creative impulses that sustain them. Nature in its naturing can be understood as the continuing acts of creation by and through which the world is sustained against the recurrent threats of nonbeing. Not all acts of creation are temporal although many are. The inner correlation between the creation and the creative power of nature will rule out in principle the earlier Christian view of this relation that insisted on a radical creation out of nothing. The doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* will prove to be misguided when we probe into the third dimension of the divine.

Turning to our analysis of the divine natures themselves, I assert that the first and second divine aspects prevail within the dimension of nature as natured. The third aspect can be partially equated with nature naturing while the fourth aspect will relocate this fundamental distinction from the standpoint of the Encompassing. The distinctions among God, nature, and that which encompasses both will emerge more fully as the analysis unfolds.

First Divine Dimension

God in its first dimension is one complex among the innumerable complexes of nature. In the words of Buchler, "If the concept of God is thought of as viable metaphysically, and not blankly endured as a stimulus to animism, it must signify a natural complex." (MNC 6) As such, God is finite and embedded in a nature that transcends its scope and power. In this dimension the divine is fragmented and splintered by the orders within which it must appear. This fragmentation is deepened by the fact that non-divine complexes have their own spheres of power and sovereignty that limit the ways in which God may become manifest. In this sense, God is fully wedded to the time process and evolves and grows within the fitful and fragmentary forces of history. God may be more strongly present in some orders than in others, although the expression of this presence will be fraught with ambiguity. The fragmentary and plurally located forces of history and nature make it impossible for God to have a clear and distinct

manifestation. Any theophany (divine appearance) will be part of a time process that will distend and regionalize that appearance.

God, as a natural complex, will contain alescent traits, or represent alescent traits within a complex. Whenever a given complex becomes permeable to the divine potency, that power will represent an alescent trait within the complex. The complex will admit this divine potency into its trait constitution. If the presence of God as fragmented origin—that is, God in its first dimension—adds to the meaning, power, and value of a complex, then we can see God as contributing to an augmentative alescence. The complex, in becoming the locus of part of the divine potency, enhances both its scope and its integrity. Its scope is broadened to include a fragment of the indefinite potency of God. Its gross integrity or contour is radically redefined to include at least one specific integrity that is ordered and shaped by the divine potency.

By the same token, God can live as one or more possibilities that prevail for any given complex. In a strong sense, human freedom is preserved by its ability to actualize or ignore those possibilities that are preserved by God. Of course, these possibilities must be ordinally located and “belong” to the person as part of his or her contour. God thus becomes part of the “predefinition” of many complexes. More generally:

The predefinition is that which is intrinsic to the complex as it prevails, *that* complex, that order of traits. The *order*, with its makeup of traits, is what basically predefines. It is represented by its predefinitions or possibilities. . . . Possibilities, therefore, it [the complex] always has, whether they vary in their general pattern or continue intact. (MNC 167)

Some of these possibilities, of course, are related to nondivine complexes. My contour as a person is changed whenever a possibility is actualized or when another ceases to be available for actualization. The most strongly relevant predefinitions are those that emerge from the divine. These possibilities are not free-floating any more than they are nonlocated. A possibility, even when divine, is always of and for a complex. By the same token, God’s possibilities are partly determined by the possibilities and actualities that prevail in nondivine complexes. The orders of the world help to shape and define the possibilities available to God. This redefinition of divine possibilities makes it possible to overcome those frameworks that would force us to locate possibilities in some alleged eternal mind of God beyond the orders of the world.

If we say, following Tillich, that God appears in works of art, we must also say that this manifestation will vary in strength and purity from

one perspectival order to another. By the same token, this presence will depend upon the spiritual capacities of the governing culture and its nonreligious horizons. Individual interpreters may be unable to see the divine presence within a given painting or piece of music and thereby ignore their own insensitivity to the higher spiritual presence. Patterns of expectation often foreclose our ability to respond to the presence of the divine. So-called "realist" conceptions of art might close off our understanding of a nonrepresentative work of art such as a color field painting by Rothko, where a striking sense of the spirit is present. Sheer hermeneutic drift and spiritual opacity frustrate God's desire to appear in the orders of nature and history. God may affect the scope and integrity of a complex in ways that remain just beyond the reach of finite interpreters. In a striking sense, God coaxes us beyond current limits. We will see this most clearly in exhibiting the third divine dimension.

God is thus a prevalence that must recognize the limits of its power. Since God is in some respects a natural order, it follows that God cannot be omnipotent in this first dimension. That is, God remains bound and measured by innumerable other orders of nature and must respond to their own forms of prevalence. God's power is limited by the sheer density and resistance of other complexes of nature, and experiences profound limits to its scope and efficacy. In this first dimension, God must wait upon the diverse and fragmented forces of life and history in order to enrich and deepen its own contour. The concept of "life" refers to those complexes of nature characterized by an inner dynamism that has its own momentum and power.

In biblical terms, this is a dimension of the spirit that moves through and among the orders of nature. "The wind [*pneuma*] blows where it wills; you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from, or where it is going. So with everyone who is born from spirit." (John 3:8) Spirit is limited in the form and manner of its appearance even though, from our finite perspective, spirit seems to move wherever its internal impulses lead it. God as spirit is the finite God that suffers and labors within the innumerable orders of nature. In this dimension, God is self-surpassing and timebound. Put differently, God in its first dimension suffers with the orders of creation and labors with them toward an elusive wholeness and harmony. Finite power and sheer embeddedness limit the expansive presence of the divine.

If God suffers with the orders of creation and experiences limits to its power because of the freedom and autonomy of many of these orders, then it follows that God is sympathetic to the travails of creation. God does not need to be a person to be sympathetic to suffering orders. The language of "sympathy" and "suffering," is applied analogically to the divine. The continuity between the divine and the nondivine provides the "space"

within which the prepersonal power of God can become relevant to persons. A God that is embedded in the orders of creation, as one order among others, knows of the demonic forces that destroy harmony and integrity. In this first divine aspect, God manifests its eternal sympathy for all suffering creatures. As noted by Hartshorne, this sympathy extends to God's willingness to cosuffer with creation. God participates in our lives and gathers our suffering to itself. In the words of Hartshorne:

The chief novelty of the New Testament is that divine love, which seems plainly affirmed in the prophetic doctrine of a merciful deity concerned with the fate of the helpless and unfortunate, is carried to the point of participation in creaturely suffering, symbolized by the Cross taken together with the doctrine of the Incarnation.²

Insofar as God remains embedded within the emergent orders of creation (nature natured), God fully participates in the pain and suffering of all orders. This ever active and expanding divine sympathy can be felt by conscious beings whenever the power of spirit breaks through the condescended shells of personal or social life.

A God bereft of omnipotence must also be unable to eradicate evil from the orders of nature and history. William James understood this dimension clearly when he affirmed that God requires human aid if the structures and forces of evil are to be overcome or weakened. Further, as repeatedly noted by Hartshorne, the concept of finite freedom requires that we acknowledge built-in limits to God's omnipotence. Put logically, God cannot but allow for evil. God can and does preserve possibilities for perceivers, but cannot legislate whether and how they will be actualized. If God is part of numerous temporal and spatial structures, as well as of those that are neither spatial nor temporal, it follows that those orders have non-divine traits that limit the efficacy of the divine. God is fully cognizant of the intrinsic tragedy of the world and its conflicting orders.

Second Divine Dimension

In the second dimension, God lives as the lure and goad to personal and social transformation. In terms of Boston Personalism, God works tirelessly to empower all selves with the dignity of an autonomous personality. The evolution from the prepersonal to the personal stage is made possible by the dynamic and propulsive energy of God. In its second aspect, the divine must contend with the recalcitrance of the inorganic and organic realms. But within these orders lie many possibilities for growth and the emergence of self-consciousness. Nature struggles to give birth to selves.

Each self leaps out of the oblivion of its genus and gains its own autonomy and uniqueness. Whenever an order of nature adds the trait of personality it becomes more fully and internally related to the actuality of God.

If the movement toward selfhood, what the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins calls "selving," is found throughout the orders of nature, it follows that this precarious gift must itself be nurtured from a source outside of itself.³ The power behind an internal entelechy comes from selving and no personal entelechy can long prevail that is bereft of divine support. God lives as the sustaining presence that protects each personality from the forces of inertia and decay. Tillich forcefully argued that God is not itself a person, except by analogy, but lives as the ground for those acts of individuation that make personality possible. In his *Systematic Theology* he exhibits this distinction:

"Personal God" does not mean that God is *a* person. It means that God is the ground of everything personal and that he carries within himself the ontological power of personality. He is not a person, but he is not less than personal.⁴

God cannot be less than personal because the impulse toward personality must come from an ontological potency that understands the full manifestation of the self. "Selving" is a gift of that dimension of God that drives toward the future and the manifestation of greater actuality and consciousness. This propulsive and eschatological dimension of the divine is most clearly manifest in the emergence of centers of personality. We call this aspect the eschatological aspect because of the priority of the future in the evolution of personality from the prepersonal matrix. Within the opening created by the future, the nascent self can find the room within which to satisfy its inner longing for expansion and articulation. Such centers are what they are through the divine lure that empowers growth and unending transformation.

In Buchler's terms, although not applied in this way in his perspective, this would mean that God enhances the scope and richness of our proceptive domains. These domains represent the cumulative "reach" of the self within its various worlds. Buchler defines these domains:

The *gross* proceptive domain comprises all that belongs to the individual's living makeup, the segment of nature within which he functions, the past that is actually or potentially alive for him, the sum of his suppositions, guiding principles, commitments, and peculiarities. The gross domain is the class of all his interrelated procepts. The *floating* proceptive domain represents the summed-up self or pro-

ceiver within a given situation. . . . Finally, the *immanent* proceptive domain comprises all that is present to—that is, available for—the proceiver at a given moment; it is the gross domain represented in minimal cross section. (TGT 8–9)

The relative value or relevance of past, present, and potential procepts, is to some extent derived from the divine potencies that operate in some procepts. These “epiphanies of power,” a conception not used by Buchler, stand as traces of the inclusion of the divine within the various proceptive domains. Religious query consists, to some extent, in the exploration of those procepts that give the gross, floating, and immanent proceptive domains some sense of a transcending potency that cannot be reduced to the nondivine powers of nature. The self is transformed whenever it assimilates procepts that exhibit traces of the divine.

The proceptive direction is perhaps even more clearly permeable to the first divine dimension. The self finds a new depth and source of meaning whenever its proceptive direction is modified by the assimilation of the divine life. The religious concept of conversion points to the possibility of a profound change in the proceptive direction. God, as the fragmented origin, compels the self to acknowledge traits and powers not of its own making. Nor are these traits the “natural” product of nondivine complexes. In more traditional language, the proceptive direction receives an intimation of a theonomous core that lives as the true measure for the movement and growth of the self.

Can we extend the concepts of proceptive domain and proceptive direction to the divine itself? Peter Hare argues that such an extension is strongly suggested by the ordinal perspective. He argues that God has its own proceptive domain and that God’s proceptive direction is manifest as “providence.” Hare states:

“Proception” is the term Buchler uses to refer to the life-process of a human individual. I can find nothing in his principles which precludes a superhuman form of proception. . . . If human experience has what Buchler calls “proceptive direction,” couldn’t we suppose that much more influential forms of proceptive direction can be found—what might be thought of as a process form of Providence?⁵

This extension or projection of proceptive domain and direction to the divine natures does violate several key principles of ordinality. For one thing, the concepts pertaining to proception are specifically designed to deal with the unique features of the human process and reflect forms of relation and embeddedness that are not necessarily found in the divine. For another,

All other natural complexes are located in other complexes and are discontinuous with some others. God, on the other hand, is not discontinuous with any complex but has a scope that is limited only by the Encompassing. This sense of God's continuity with each and "every" natural complex converges with the second argument. The second indirect argument, derived from the general argumentative strategy of Schleiermacher, moves from the traits of lived experience to that which makes such experience possible. This type of argument does not impose traits derived from the human process onto the divine. It is a type of transcendental argument moving from what is the case to what we must suppose as its enabling condition. Schleiermacher's concept of "absolute dependence" expresses that quality of experience that cannot be derived from any given natural complex or group of complexes. Our experience of grace, the more traditional term for absolute dependence, can only be possible if experience is permeable to the third divine dimension. These two indirect arguments provide their own type of "evidence" and force us to admit those senses in which God is not a natural complex.

In this dimension, God is most unlike the order of personality and most like an impersonal potency that can never be adequately rendered in finite analogies or concrete metaphors. From the standpoint of the ordinal perspective, such a God would be an unlocated power that does not actualize or realize possibilities. Buchler would reject this metaphoric and conceptual extension of his perspective. As noted, other philosophical and theological concerns makes such an extension compelling and these will emerge more fully as we proceed. As the power that sustains the infinite orders of the world, God is not merely a natural complex or a part of the time process. While time is itself an order and thus located within some orders and not others, time is not a trait of nature as a whole. By the same token, space, while applicable to some orders, is not applicable to all orders. Some orders are temporal and/or spatial and some are not. In exhibiting the characteristics of God in this third dimension it is important not to assume that God has traits derived from aspects of nature as nature. Consequently, God's third aspect cannot be part of a temporal process or confined to specific spatial locations. It is more conceptually compelling to see God as the quiet and still self-effacing origin that makes nature and worldhood possible. This origin is self-effacing in that it is not a first principle or natural primitive from which complexes can be derived, either logically or causally. Rather, such an origin, unlike any other kind of origin, refuses to intrude its presence into the orders that it sustains. Consequently, God in this dimension is omnipotent in only a derivative sense. This power cannot be defined as a "power over" or as a "power against" but as an enabling power that frees its "objects" from a dependence on a demonic or devour-

ing origin. The metaphor of "devouring origin" evokes the neo-Platonic idea that emanated orders are pulled back into the emanating power, thus destroying their independence and any principle of individuation. From the standpoint of the human process, the third divine dimension is felt in the sheer difference between given complexes and meaning horizons on the one hand, and the indefinite and awe-inspiring scope of God on the other. The movement of thought and proception is freed from constriction by an encounter with the third divine dimension. Buchler, speaking out of a very different philosophic context, describes one sense in which the divine provides us with a sense of contrast:

If God were understood in part as that complex of nature which preserves overwhelming contrast with the finite, then to God might be ascribed perpetual consummations of a related kind—delimiting all other complexes, opening human ways beyond prevailing limits, and constantly renewing in the experiential orders of the world (in the perspectives of man) that sensitivity to the similar and the different which lies at the base of query. (MNC 7–8)

God, as a complex discriminated, stands over and against the other orders of the world. Thus the divine complex has a unique status within the metaphysics of natural complexes. On the one hand, God is clearly a natural complex and is thus located "within" the innumerable orders of the world. Yet, on the other hand, God is one of the most striking manifestations of nature naturing, of "providingness." This tension within the divine natures locates God on both sides of the ontological difference. In Heideggerian terms, the ontological difference is that between Being and a being. In ordinal terms, the ontological difference is between natural complexes and "providingness."⁷ Buchler would resist this extension of the ordinal perspective because it seems to put God in the dubious position of violating the basic traits of any complex. Yet the ordinal perspective is itself ambiguous concerning the notion of that dimension of nature that is not commensurate with the concept of complexes. God is thus both a complex within nature (first, second, and fourth dimensions) and the sheer "providingness," Tillich's "power of Being," for the innumerable orders of the world.⁸ As noted above, God is not to be equated with sheer prevalence alone. Not only is God an alescent trait within many complexes, but God also "contains" alescent traits within its own natures. Insofar as God becomes permeable to that which is novel or which lies outside of the scope of its power, it must allow alescent traits into its contour. This reinforces the process notion that God can be surprised in time and can thus respond to and become aware of that which is not prefigured in antecedent traits.

In Tillich's well known, and well worn, formulation, this dimension of the divine can be seen as the ground of "Being" that overcomes the forces of absolute and dialectical "nonbeing." In his *Systematic Theology* he redefines this category in terms of the maternal. He states:

In so far as it [the ground of Being] is symbolical, it points to the mother-quality of giving birth, carrying, and embracing, and, at the same time, of calling back, resisting independence of the created, and swallowing it.⁹

Here is adumbrated his recurrent preoccupation with the polarity of mysticism and guilt consciousness. Tillich perhaps goes too far in his personification of the forces of emanation and return but does, nonetheless, focus on the inner logic of this third divine aspect. God as nature naturing equally sustains all offspring no matter what their specific ontological or ethical status. The lament of Job points to the profound mystery surrounding the seeming indifference of the divine to the radical difference between good and evil. It is no longer possible to fall back on the notion that evil is a mere diminution of good or that evil is a necessary enrichment of the cosmic process. While God struggles against evil in its first two dimensions, the third dimension is detached from these struggles. The counter pressure to emanation is not the "swallowing" envisioned by Tillich, but the advance of finite autonomy and creative evolution. In this dimension, God is beyond good and evil and lives as both ground and abyss for all of the orders of nature. To say that God is both ground and abyss is to reaffirm that God is a self-effacing origin. The metaphor of "ground" evokes the sustaining power of the divine, while the metaphor of "abyss" evokes the sheer otherness and indifference of the divine.

In scholastic trinitarian language, we can call this dimension the dimension of God the Father. Needless to say, both paternal and maternal analogies cloud the conceptual structure and intrude traits that are simply inappropriate at this level of generality. If the first and second dimensions of the divine represent the orders of spirit, then this third and ubiquitous dimension represents the sheer sustaining power of God as the ground and abyss of nature's innumerable orders. Such a "power," as noted, cannot be understood as an omnipotent or causal efficacy that somehow alters the trait configuration of complexes. It is a reticent power that lives only insofar as it gives all of its power away. The eternal giving over of this power is, as noted, to some degree analogous to the neo-Platonic force of emanation but is far less bound to that which is ventured forth than the emanated is from its emanating source. Nature as natured is free of origin even while receiv-

ing its very freedom from that elusive origin. Historically this harks back to Meister Eckhart's concept of *Abgeschiedenheit* (detachment or letting be).

The relationship between God and nature has been understood in three broad ways in the tradition. Classical theism, especially as manifest in such thinkers as Kierkegaard and Barth, sees God as radically divorced from all created orders and as merely interacting in the form of miracles that violate the causal order or in the form of the Incarnation that is a once and for all intrusion of God *qua* Christ into an otherwise nondivine world. Of course, traditional perspectives, such as that of Aquinas, also affirm the dependence of the world of God and thereby brook confusion concerning the dependency relation between God and the world. At the other extreme is a pantheism that equates God with the innumerable orders of nature. Such a perspective often relies on the category of substance (Spinoza) as its universal term of designation. The third conception of the God/nature correlation is that of panentheism, which struggles to find the ways in which God both is and is not to be equated with the orders of nature. Panentheism, particularly as developed by Hartshorne, is conceptually far richer than its two competing perspectives even though its own inner logic has not been fully explored. By sharpening the distinction between nature nated and nature naturing it is possible to refine the general panentheistic framework.

As stated above, God cannot be understood to create the innumerable complexes of the world out of nothing. In its first two dimensions, God is a natural complex that is to be found within the orders of nature. In the words of John Ryder, "For God to obtain at all, it is necessary that it both locate traits and be itself ordinally located. Neither of these conceptions seems to be compatible with a creator *ex nihilo*."¹⁰ It is clear that an ordinally located God cannot be the creator of "all" complexes. On a deeper level, the very concept of a totality of complexes is rendered deeply problematic by the ordinal perspective. God, *qua* natural complex, is as much a product of nature in its naturing as are all other complexes. And, according to the principle of ontological parity, God cannot be more real than any other complex even if God has greater scope and power than any other complex.

The third divine dimension, God as Providingness, as ordinality, is also far removed from the traditional notion of God the creator. While God's scope is coextensive with the scope of the world, God is not separable from those complexes sustained by divine presence and power. Metaphorically we can say that God is more the sustainer and preserver of the world than its creator. To talk of a time before ordinality or before Providingness is to misunderstand the nature of these categories. Nor does it help to talk of the cocreation of time and world as if such a portrayal could

reach into the heart of ordinality. Again it must be pointed out that time and creation are categories of more limited scope and only apply to specific orders in specific respects. Neither category can be exhaustively applied to the world or innumerable complexes.

God is identical to nature in its naturing in the sense that God lives as the enabling and sustaining source for all of the orders of the world. This source is, as noted, more than a bare origin, or grounding substance, and lives as the potency guaranteeing freedom for all ventured forth orders. It is a misguided extension of the ordinal framework to simply equate God with all of the orders of the world. God transcends creation. But this transcendence is not that expressed by a bare theism that would insist on a wholly other God. To use a paradoxical formulation, we can say that this is an immanent transcendence in which God never removes itself from the orders of nature. God, as sustaining love, is present to all complexes. But this presence does not interfere with the traits structure of any order. God's presence is as gentle as it is eternal.

Thus God is both finite and infinite, but in different respects. Insofar as God is an order within nature, and thereby contains its own suborders, God is finite and located by the nondivine. Insofar as God is that which sustains the orders of nature, while eternally refraining from altering their trait constitution, God is infinite. God's eternal growth and self-surpassing is manifest in the first and second divine aspects as these participate in the plenitude of the world and its various time processes. What has not been articulated in the above account is that dimension which makes such self-surpassability possible in the first place.

Fourth Divine Dimension

As is well known, Hartshorne reworks the surpassability thesis to allow for God's own growth and continual renewal in the face of the nondivine.¹¹ In affirming that God is that than which no greater can be conceived we are also saying that God is not complete and self-contained in its natures and thus can achieve greater scope and richness for its own complex life. From this we are compelled to conclude that God, in addition to confronting its "other" in the nondivine complexes of nature, confronts an ultimate other which is not an order within nature. This ultimate "other" or divine alterity is that which gives the divine natures the "space" within which to grow and expand. Put differently, the eternal possibility for divine growth cannot be guaranteed by the world's complexes any more than it can emerge as a product of nature. God cannot be both the growth and the clearing within which that growth occurs. There remains an elusive reality that lives as the lure for God's own self-surpassing. Analogous to the divine

lure that God presents to personal and social transformation, this ultimate lure preserves the clearing within which God may become more fully what it is. Insofar as God has an entelechy, that internal goal is quickened and deepened by that which encompasses both nature natured and nature in its naturing. This "other" is perhaps best termed the Encompassing itself. The concept of the "Encompassing" is firmly denied by Buchler as it seems to evoke something that cannot be explored or that does not have any kind of ordinal location. For Buchler, such a concept can only have value in linguistic orders.

The concept of the Encompassing is well known from the writings of Karl Jaspers.¹² Unfortunately, Jaspers frequently failed to distinguish the Encompassing from the reality of Transcendence (i.e., God). In his understanding of religion and the life of faith, Jaspers struggles to find that which radically transcends all intraworldly pictures of the divine. In his *Philosophical Faith and Revelation* he gives this account of the evolution of religious consciousness from the primitive stage of natural forces to the evocation of the Godhead:

The liberation of man proceeds from dark, savage forces to personal gods, from gods beyond good and evil to moral gods, from the gods to the one God, and on to the ultimate freedom of recognizing the one personal God as a cipher. We may call this last liberation the ascent from God to the Godhead, from the ciphers to what makes them speak. It is our liberation from the hobbles with which our own conceptions and thoughts prevent us from reaching the truth that halts all thinking.¹³

A cipher is a transparent symbol that effaces itself before something that is not delimited by content or form. The Godhead, as understood by Jaspers, is not a personal God and cannot be understood in any of the usual categories of theology or philosophy. It would not be inappropriate to see the term "Godhead" as analogous to the term Encompassing. The Encompassing is not a reality that lies within the divine nature and cannot be equated with God. The distinction between God and the Godhead is thus similar to that between God and the Encompassing. Thus, in articulating the fourth divine aspect, we must make the distinction between God and the Encompassing sharp and total.

God's sense of its own incompleteness is maintained by the Encompassing that is not an order of nature and cannot be equated with the "sum" of all worldly orders. Nor can the Encompassing be understood through the analogy of the horizon. By definition, a horizon, as a prethematic structure of meaning and truth, prevails as only one horizon among others. Any

given horizon will contain its own content and have its own internal traits. More importantly, such a horizon will have referential structures that illuminate, in however attenuated a fashion, orders outside of itself. The Encompassing lies beyond all horizons, be they finite or divine, and has no hermeneutic or semiotic content. As sheer alterity the Encompassing is that which is ever receding from the grasp of horizontal structures. From the divine standpoint, the Encompassing lives as the lure that creates an eternal restlessness within the divine life. God cannot rest on its plenitude or indefinite complexity. Rather, the divine natures all live under the impress of that which encompasses such plenitude. The Encompassing, as void of all plenitude, ever empties itself in the face of that which would grasp it.

We must further clarify the differences among nature, God, and the Encompassing. Nature, as noted, is itself constituted by two fundamental dimensions, namely, that of nature as natured and nature naturing. Nature natured is the "sum" of all orders, including the order known as God. As such, this dimension of nature is encompassed by nature naturing. Since nature naturing is partially equivalent to the third divine aspect, it follows that the God that lives within the power of naturing encompasses its own finite dimensions as manifest in nature natured. That is, God in its first two dimensions is encompassed by nature as a "whole." The infinite divine aspect encompasses the finite divine dimensions and gathers them under the gentle power of nature naturing. Thus God both encompasses and is encompassed. This seeming paradox vanishes when it is understood that one is talking of distinct aspects of God.

But it is not sufficient to trace out the ways in which nature naturing encompasses all orders, including the order known as God. Conceptual clarity is only attained when it is recognized that the Encompassing is that which transcends even nature in its naturing. Insofar as nature naturing has its manifestation in the orders of nature natured, it can not be the Encompassing. God, in its first three dimensions cannot fill in the Encompassing or give it some kind of delimited quality. The urgency behind God's incompleteness in all divine aspects, is a gift of the Encompassing. God must be restless and self-surpassing under the loving pressure of that which encompasses its nature. Hence the fourth divine dimension is filled with longing for eternal self-expansion in the face of the void that stands before it. Returning to the language of Jaspers and Meister Eckhart, God longs to become absorbed into the Godhead even though such an absorption is an impossibility. The continual death and rebirth of God is only possible because of the love of the Encompassing for that which is encompassed.

God becomes crucified under the power of the Encompassing. Put differently, God is forced to let go of its fullness and power in the light of that which can never be encompassed by its own reach. The Encompassing

humbles the divine and shows it its own locatedness. Divine compassion for the suffering orders of the world has its ultimate source in God's recognition of its own incompleteness in the face of the Encompassing.

Yet God's experience of its own crucifixion is gathered under the deeper experience of its eternal resurrection. The Encompassing not only shows the divine its fragmented and limited reality but gives the divine continual hope and renewal. This renewal is the gift of the Encompassing to God as the divine struggles to overcome the bifurcation between and among its other natures. God's quest for wholeness is secured in the lure of the Encompassing that refuses to let God become subject to a self-satisfied closure.

In trinitarian terms, this final divine aspect is the Christological dimension in which God becomes a child to itself. That is, God, in giving birth to new possibilities within its life of eternal self-surpassing, experiences the mystery of that which gives birth to itself. This continual crucifixion and resurrection is the universal actuality that empowers the finite transformations in the worldly orders. The Encompassing is thus the midwife for God's self-transcendence, and through this the hidden potency behind natural and historical evolution.

The Divine Life

All four divine aspects belong together within the divine life itself. The Encompassing gathers and secures each dimension against a bifurcation that would destroy divine unity. God lives with its own lack of power and endures the shocks and diremptions of nature and history. At the same time, God lives in the lure of hope that quickens and transforms personal and social reality. Suffering and hope are themselves gathered under the quiet and eternal power of nature naturing and preserved in their actuality. In a very real sense, God lives in the infinite complexity of its own death and transfiguration in which the Encompassing holds open the highest love of all. God lives in the gift of the love that comes both from its creatures and from the Encompassing. In light of this dual love, God can endure the suffering of the world and its orders.

Christian theology, as bound to the self-giving of God in the Christ, becomes permeable to the power of the Encompassing that locates and radically alters the reality of Christhood. If, using the language of Tillich, we wish to see Christ as the New Being that overcomes the estrangement of essence and existence, then we can see the Encompassing as the ultimate clearing within which the Old Being becomes redeemed and the New Being remakes the world. Seen in this light, the Christocentric moment belongs to the innumerable orders of nature and not to a time-bound human community.

Notes

1. MNC 6–7. See “List of Abbreviations” for Buchler’s works, p. xiii.
2. Charles Hartshorne, *A Natural Theology for Our Time* (La Salle, Illinois: The Open Court Publishing Company, 1967), pp. 104–05.
3. For a more detailed treatment of Hopkins’ analysis of selfhood, see my, “The Christhood of Things,” *The Drew Gateway* 52 (Fall 1981), pp. 41–47.
4. Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), vol. 1, p. 245.
5. Peter H. Hare and John Ryder, “Buchler’s Ordinal Metaphysics and Process Theology,” *Process Studies*, 10: 3 & 4 (Fall–Winter 1980), pp. 127–128. Here pp. 343.
6. The nature of these communal structures has been worked out in my book, *The Community of Interpreters* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1987).
7. For further analysis on this issue, see my, “Naturalism, Measure, and the Ontological Difference,” *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 23: 1 (1985), pp. 19–32.
8. For Buchler’s criticisms of such an extension of his perspective, with particular reference to Tillich, see, “Conversation Between Justus Buchler and Robert S. Corrington,” *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 3: 4 (1989), pp. 261–274.
9. Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, pp. 293–94.
10. Hare, Ryder, op. cit., p. 123, here, p. 338.
11. For more detailed criticism of Hartshorne, see my, “Toward a Transformation of Neoclassical Theism,” *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 28: 4 (1987), pp. 391–406.
12. In particular see his, *Philosophy of Existence*, trans. by Richard F. Grabau (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), *Reason and Existenz*, trans. by William Earle (New York: Noonday Press, 1955), and *Von der Wahrheit* (Munich: R. Piper, 1947).
13. Karl Jaspers, *Philosophical Faith and Revelation*, trans. by E. B. Ashton (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), p. 284.