

Organic Unity and God

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THE PURPOSE of this paper is to present and defend two theses: (1) to be is to be an organic unity and (2) consequently, whatever God is, God is an organic unity. The first task, then, is to explain what is meant by organic unity and the part it plays in the nature of being.

Organic unity is unity that is not complete unity. In fact, it is unity in which plurality is as much a part of what is as is unity. The term "organic plurality" would serve just as well. The only reason for using the term "organic unity" is that it already has had a long established history. Perhaps it would be preferable simply to use the word "organic," if we could refrain from identifying the general meaning intended here with narrower meanings employed by biologists. For by "organic," as this term is used here, is meant being both one and many and equally one and many. That is, being one and being many are equally inherent in the nature of being. Basically, this is all that is meant by being organic.

Now if being is both one and many, in what sense is it one and in what sense is it many? Insofar as being, or insofar as what is is, being is one. This is expressed in the logical "law of identity." But the law of identity is not the only law of thought or being. Being is more than mere being. To be is not only to be what is but also to be something other than what is as being. Insofar as anything is other than mere being it is not mere being. Thus being entails opposition. But this opposition is not simple. For whatever respect something is not being, neither that respect in which it is not being nor that respect in which it is being exhausts its nature.

There are other aspects of its nature and these aspects are many. Thus the barest description of anything must include a description of it as both one and many.

The most general aspects of being are usually called "categories." Can the problem of the one and the many be solved simply by saying that there is one being and many categories? No, for each category is itself an organic unity, and being occurs in beings. Each category is what it is, but a description of its nature, even as a category, is not exhausted by saying that it is what it is. Let us examine a number of such categories, especially those commonly associated with the nature of God.

It is not a part of the purpose of this paper to say what God is, i. e., that God has certain characteristics and not certain others. For it follows from the first thesis that no one statement, or even one set of statements, about God can describe adequately what God is. Rather, the purpose is to say that, insofar as it may be truly said that God is so and so, it may, or rather must, be said also that God is both one and many with respect to that so and so.

It is often said that God is eternal. The question then arises: What is time? Is time a continuous infinite duration, or is time a series of discontinuous finite events? Put in this way, time entails a paradox, for time involves both continuous infinite duration and discontinuous finite events. Time has a dual character (as H. G. Alexander, "Time as Dimension and History," points out) or rather an organic character. Time is both one and many, one as duration and many as events, one as continuous and many as discontinuous. Relating time to God, is God merely eternal, or is God also temporal? If time has a dual or organic

nature, does not God also have a dual or organic nature with respect to time? God both endures and passes. God endures continuously, but God also passes momentarily. God is at each moment of time, but as each moment passes, God, insofar as he is at each moment, also passes or ceases to be. Now the ceasing to be of God is not the whole of God, just as discontinuous events are not the whole of time. But, with respect to time, God's ceasing to be is just as much a part of what God is as is God's continuing through time. The organic view is that God is both one and many with respect to time.

Consider next the categories of change and novelty. It is often said that God never changes and that he is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Thus there can be nothing new for God. But if God is temporal, then God is entailed in whatever change is involved in the passage of time. To the extent that each moment is new in the sense that it did not occur before, God as existing in each moment is new in the sense that God as existing in that moment did not occur or exist before. While there may be a sense in which God is unchanging, it is equally true to say that God is changing, even always changing. While there may be a sense in which there is nothing new for God, it is equally true to say that whatever is new is new for God and there is always something new. Thus something is always beginning. We say, "In the beginning, God ..." Of course if God is present in each moment, God is inherent in each beginning. In this sense it is true that God still begins. This is not to deny that it is also true to say that for God there was no beginning, that is, no first beginning. The organic view is that God both never and ever changes and that God is both never and ever new.

Consider next God as creator—or cause of all. Causes entail effects and are entailed in their effects. If God is the cause of all, God is entailed in all

effects—at least as the cause of the effects. But since whatever is an effect is not merely an effect but also a cause of other effects, each thing which is an effect is also a cause, and thus God is not only cause, but also effect. For God as cause cannot be separated from that which is both cause and effect. It is as true to say that God is the effect of everything as to say that God is the cause of everything. The organic view is that God is not only creator but also creation. In Whitehead's terms ("Religion in the Making," p. 102), God is a "self-creating creature."

Theologians commonly are troubled by the problem of creation: Does creation involve the making of something from nothing, or if something is made must it be made from something? The organic view is that both of these statements are equally true. In any cause-and-effect situation, an effect as an effect is different from its cause as cause, yet what can there be in the effect that was not already in its cause? Effects are caused by nothing but causes. Yet also, insofar as an effect is different from its cause, its difference was not in its cause. But if its difference was not in its cause, it must be uncaused or self-caused. Does causation then involve some "spontaneous creation?" Yes, if by spontaneous creation is meant that an effect is different from its cause. The organic view of causation is that each cause-and-effect situation involves both complete determinism, in the sense that there is nothing in the effect which was not caused, and some spontaneity, in the sense that the effect is in some respect different from its cause. If this is not immediately clear, perhaps it should be pointed out that each effect is really a result of many causes and each cause results in many effects. Each cause is also an organic unity, for while it is proper to speak of whatever produces an effect as "the cause," yet it is obvious that each effect has many antecedent conditions entailed in its pro-

duction. Now each of the many causes of an effect contributed to the effect in such a way that the effect is entirely a result of these causes and there is nothing in the effect that was not caused. But since each of the causes is different from the effect and from each other, the effect is not only different from each of its causes, but is different from all of them together in that it has a kind of togetherness of result which was not entailed in their eachness. It is this difference which is unique, and, in this sense, spontaneous. Now what has all this to do with God and creation? If creation is simply another name for causation, then creation involves both the view that if anything is made it must be made from something (or that each effect is completely caused) and the view that if anything is made it is in some sense different from that from which it is made (or that each effect involves some spontaneity). If God is a creator, then God can make something from nothing only if he makes something from something. But God, as the cause of all, is different from his creation as effect. Thus there is something new, which is not God as cause, in creation. But it is also true that God is effect of everything, God as created is in some respect new and different from God as cause. Thus does God change and progress. Creation of anything by God entails some transition by God. This means that God becomes something which God once was not, and insofar as he has become different he is not longer what he once was in this respect. All of these statements regarding transition by God do not thereby deny that God is also in some sense transcendent to the changes in transition. For when there is change there is that which remains through change and it is as true to say that that which remains is God as to say that that which changes is God.

Another question which bothers the-

ologians is: "How is God related to the world?" Is God above the world ("supernatural") or in the world? or both? The problem of whether God is transcendent or immanent is essentially a problem of external and internal relations. The organic view is that each entity is both internally and externally related, and that every relation is both an internal and an external relation. Since each entity is in some sense different from other entities, it is external to, and thus externally related to, other entities. But since each entity is also in some sense the same as other entities, it is internal to, or internally related to, these entities. Every relation is both an internal and an external relation because, insofar as two things are related they form a whole (at least they have the same relation) and thus the relation is internal to that whole, and insofar as the two things are two they are different from each other and the relation between the two depends upon their twoness and upon their being to this extent external to each other. How then is God related to the world? Both externally and internally. God is both different from the world and thus "above" the world or "supernatural" and also the same as the world or in the world or natural. It is as true to say that God is immanent as to say that God is transcendent. To ignore God as immanent is to ignore God as much as to ignore God as transcendent is to ignore God. One might ask: Does God as transcendent transcend all? The organic view is that there is nothing that transcends all. Therefore whatever God is, God does not transcend all. Of course, there is that which is all that is, but all that is is not all, for all includes all that is not as well as all that is. While one may identify God with that which transcends all that is (thus equating God and being), to identify God with that which transcends all is to identify God with nothing.

Theologians are troubled also about whether God is actual or potential. Since there is a difference between actuality and potentiality, many seem to think that if God is actual then he is not potential and if he is potential then he is not actual. But the organic view is that there can be no potentialities without actualities and no actualities without potentialities. A potentiality is whatever an entity is capable of becoming, and what an entity is capable of becoming depends upon what capacities it actually has. Only that which is actual has potentialities. If God is actual, then God has potentialities. Since actualization of potentialities generates new potentialities, God gets new potentialities through, and only through, actualization of other potentialities. If these new potentialities are God's, then God must be the new actuality which has these new potentialities. God can never actualize all of his potentialities, for each actualization begets new potentialities.

Another theological problem pertains to the goodness of God. Is God good? If goodness is to be identified with ends or goals, then God is good when God is ending or when his goals are being reached. If we may identify instrumental and intrinsic values with means and ends, then God as cause is means or instrumental value and God as effect is end or intrinsic value. Ends or intrinsic values exist actually only in a process which is ending, but not in having ended. For that which has ended no longer exists and is no longer actual. To be perfect is to have reached its end. Thus if God is perfect, God has already ended. Is God perfect? Has God ended? Yes and no. Insofar as God has passed in passage or has been immanent in those ends which have been reached already, God has passed and is perfected. But insofar as God still passes, is still immanent in what is now being realized or is now ending, God is imper-

fect but alive. Insofar as God is potentiality, or power to become, God is not yet actual and is not yet even imperfect, let alone perfect—except insofar as such potentiality entails some present actuality which has this power to become. Now if God is good (i. e., intrinsic value), is God also evil? The organic view is that God is both good and evil, instrumentally as well as intrinsically. Evil is that which opposes good. If God were merely one, and not both one and many, God could not be both good and evil. But God is organic and embraces otherness and opposition naturally. While intrinsic value consists of ending (striving toward or arriving at ends) intrinsic disvalue also consists in ending, but it is ending which is in conflict with other ends. Those ends are evil which prevent the arrival of other ends. Whenever one end prevents another and the other prevents the one, both of these ends are good and evil at the same time. Evil appears in conflict of goods. Evil is relative to good (and good is prior to evil), and specific evils derive their evilness from the conflict of specific goods. The way to reduce evil is to reduce conflict of goods or conflict of goals. This means more integration of goals. This is possible. But since to be is to be dynamic and to generate new goals, reduction of conflict and of evil is possible only to a certain extent. Final peace is impossible. The battle of good and evil is unending, and the hope of some ultimate armageddon in which evil will be vanquished forever is unrealistic. God is inextricably immersed in the nature of being and thus naturally partakes of the dynamic nature of the universe which is, as someone has said, "an eternal problem in eternal solution."

What about teleology? Is God purposive? Do future goals cause present actions? The organic view is "Yes, at least partly so." Of course God as creator (i. e., as efficient cause) is not God

as final cause. But God as organic can be both efficient and final cause. How is it possible for that which is future to cause that which is present? Inherent in the organic view is the idea of levels or dimensions which has been neglected thus far in this paper. To be an organic unity is to include many entities each of which is itself an organic unity and to be included in other entities which are organic unities. For example, atoms, planets, and solar systems are all organic unities. Each has its organic nature, even though (or rather because) each is entailed in the others. Each has its own kind of activity and its own kind of time. If every change is an event, and if to change is to become different, then there are as many kinds of events as there are kinds of becoming different. Events endure for as long or as short as it takes for a thing to become different. Atomic, planetary, and solar changes each entail different kinds of events. If each kind of event has its own kind of unitary character, e. g., the circulation of earth about sun called a year and the circulation of earth about its axis, called a day, and if some events organically include others, as a day is included in a year, then the completion of any year event requires the completion not only of one but of many day events. Now the last day which completes a year event is both future with respect to each of the day events which precede it and present with respect to the year event. That is, what is future for one entity may be present for another. Insofar as the year event is unitary, it has a kind of force which is both compelling and partly future with respect to each day event. Thus do present lower-level events act as if caused by events whose completion is simultaneous only with something in their own future. Thus every present event is involved in some causation by something which is future for it. Now if teleology is thus natural

and inherent in the very nature of being then God also is involved in such teleology. Insofar as God is immanent in any process, God is entailed in some causation of present by future. It is proper to identify God with telos, or final cause, provided we do not do so merely. Furthermore, since final causation exists actually only in actual events, God as final cause passes with the passage of events. Each new event participates in the generation of new final causes and thus God, as final cause, is constantly being regenerated.

Perhaps the most troublesome problem which theologians have to face is the problem: "Is God a person?" The organic view is that the statements, "God is a person" and "God is not a person (i. e., is other than a person)," are equally true. The main difficulty lies in deciding what is meant by "person." Insofar as there are certain characteristics which apply to all beings (e. g., organic unity) God and persons are alike, and in this sense it is proper to speak of God as a person. But insofar as God is different from human persons, God is not personal. Furthermore, insofar as God is immanent in persons God is personal, and insofar as God transcends persons God is not personal. God is personal only in persons, or insofar as he is like persons. God is dependent for his being personal upon the being of persons.

This paper itself is something of an organic unity, dealing only with one problem—organic unity and God—by dealing with many problems, including those relating to time, change, causation, immanence and transcendence, actuality and potentiality, good and evil, purpose, and personality. Like all organic unities, it is a whole which contains many parts but which is also a part of larger wholes. There is much more to be said about organic unity and God.