

SONTAG ON GOD-DEFENDING-HIMSELF

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In his paper, "The Defense of God," Professor Fredrick Sontag has recently set forth a novel position.¹ It is a position, however, that I do not find altogether clear or satisfactory. More especially, I do not find clear his concept *God-defending-Himself*. Much of the importance of the Sontag essay rests on issues raised in relation to this concept. In the following I shall first sketch out some of the more salient points in the thesis of Sontag, while also underlining deep-seated incoherences in his concept *God-defending-Himself*. Second, I shall suggest questions Sontag ought to have raised but did not. These questions lead to the core of the difficulties that, I suppose, are troubling Sontag. It is here that we shall encounter modern views concerning the concepts *knowledge* and *nature*. It is these views, I claim, that seriously undermine any attempt to make sense of the concept *God-defending-Himself*.

The View of Sontag

It is important to notice Sontag takes in his essay what he considers a traditional Judeo-Christian stance. More specifically, Sontag stresses "Christianity with which I am more familiar [than Judaism] as an example" of what he understands by "God and His failure to defend Himself against those who would thwart His

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¹ Sontag, Fredrick, "The Defense of God," in *The Defense of God*; eds. John K. Roth and Fredrick Sontag (New York: Paragon House, 1985), pp. 1-14.

divine plans."² The traditions of Christianity, then, provide the conceptual framework in which we are to understand the terms "Divinity" and "God," and both the assumptions and arguments of Sontag. In this tradition, God is viewed as an individual of immense power wishing to bring about good in the Universe. And even if a theologian in the Christian tradition disagrees that God is omnipotent, nonetheless granting "if a Divinity can be said to exist, [such a theologian would claim that] it is at least the most powerful being in the universe."³

In assuming a traditional position, Sontag adopts the notion that God is an individual of some sort. This position is now under vigorous attack.⁴ Not only is God accepted as an individual. He is anthropomorphized, by Sontag, as an individual *in* the Universe. God is not, as an individual, simply one more fact or one more item among many others. The traditional Christian view maintains, for instance, that God is in no way describable, and hence individuated, in terms of space and time. God is, according to the tradition, different in kind from His creation, the Universe. All items within the Universe have parts, are mutable, are finite, are not omnipotent, and the like. The tradition holds, however, that God is without parts, unchangeable, infinite, omnipotent, and so on, precisely because He is not "in" the Universe. Thus, the historical correctness of the view Sontag holds of traditional Christianity is open to serious questioning. In any event, the view he holds does lead into incoherencies.

Of the various traditional Divine Attributes, Sontag concentrates on that of omnipotence, comparing the power of God to *other things in the universe*. Claiming to remain within a traditional Christian theological framework as he perceives it,

2 *Idem*, p. 2. In keeping with both "the tradition" and the piece of Sontag, the masculine pronoun is retained when referring to the Divinity.

3 *Idem*, p. 1.

4 See, for instance, Gordon D. Kaufman's, *An Essay On Theological Method* (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1975).

Sontag suggests that even if the Divinity (granting there is a Divinity) is not omnipotent, yet there is no thing more powerful than God. I should suppose that Sontag would go so far as to say that even if everything within the Universe, including Satan, were to bind together in some way, all of their several powers and strengths working in concert would still be far less powerful than the power of the Divinity. Thus, even if not omnipotent, God is understood as very powerful indeed! But it is peculiar to assert, on the one hand, that God is not omnipotent, and on the other that He is more powerful than all things in the Universe, possible and actual, that could combine against Him.

Given the above scenario what, logically speaking, could be the limitations on this great power of the Divinity? One might wish to claim that God is not "absolutely omnipotent" but only "relatively omnipotent" in the sense that He cannot do that which is logically impossible to do. God cannot do that which is contradictory or entails a contradiction.⁵ For instance, supposing within the tradition that God is unchanging in His nature and being, it is logically impossible for God to do that which would require His nature to change and to be other than it is. In any event, Sontag is not clear in his reading of the Christian tradition concerning claims of the omnipotence of God. This leads him into even more serious difficulties.

Coupled with the power of God is His overarching work, "to achieve good in the world."⁶ This, Sontag reminds us, "involves the age-old problem of theodicy."⁷ If the Divinity is so very powerful, even if not all-powerful, and His purpose is to achieve good in the world, then *why* does God not achieve this purpose?

5 In the Christian tradition, see, for example, St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Part I, Question 25, Article 4. Of course, St. Thomas does not distinguish between "absolute omnipotence" and "relative omnipotence." God is simply omnipotent.

6 Sontag, p. 1.

7 *Idem*, p. 1.

Much to the credit of Sontag, he does not attempt to offer yet another account of "The Problem of Evil." Rather he says,

Countless theodicies have been written to explain why God seldom protects helpless human beings from catastrophe, but little has been done to explore the divine reason for God's failure to provide for his own defense against the attacks upon him.⁸

Therefore the exciting problem, as seen by Sontag, is "God's failure to speak out in his own defense..."⁹ given His great, if perchance not omnipotent, power.

Sontag continues by citing the God-Man, Jesus, who is defenseless against his divine mission being thwarted. "If God decided to enter the world to accomplish his will among men as Christians assert, why did he not do so with a show force appropriate to the immensity, if not omnipotence, of his power?"¹⁰ Sontag responds that according to the biblical stories, Jesus

rules out as too-simple unleashing a display of divine power to overwhelm the opposition. But why not use every weapon you possess to promote a divine plan? If our motives and intentions are good, why should we use anything less than the full power at our command? It seems foolish to lose a battle if you possess the power you need to ensure victory.¹¹

Or, again, even if God does not force compliance by the use of physical violence, "why does he not at least speak out more plainly in his own defense when the cause is threatened?"¹² When defense of the divine cause is given, "This is left to human beings (theologians) to present theories after-the-fact to account for such strange divine behavior."¹³ Such accounts given by us mortals come and go in popularity, acceptance and rejection. Further, at no time in history is there found unanimity among humans, and more specifically Christians, concerning the position(s) the Divinity wishes us to take. Indeed we are driven into divisive pluralism and skepticism by what appears to be

8 *Idem*, p. 1.

9 *Idem*, p. 2.

10 *Idem*, p. 2.

11 *Idem*, p. 2.

12 *Idem*, p. 3.

13 *Idem*, p. 2.

nothing less than "...a God who will not lay out a clear defense."¹⁴ "If only God moved less ambiguously and took action to defend the position he wants us to adopt."¹⁵

What can be made of all this, according to Sontag? At least two points. First, if God has not defended Himself, it is not because He is incapable of doing so. It is rather because, for whatever reasons unknown to us, He has chosen not to do so. Second, if there is to be a defense of God, then we humans must supply it since God "has refused to lift an arm in his own defense."¹⁶ It is important to understand fully that Sontag is not maintaining that God is powerless to defend Himself and, thus, has a "dramatic need for human help."¹⁷ On the contrary, "God is a divinity who retains full power to accomplish any task, although the time of its use can be postponed."¹⁸ And so, given his views, Sontag raises the question, "Where are God or his people under attack, and what defense can we offer?"¹⁹

What of the logical status of the concept *God-defending-Himself* as introduced and used by Sontag both to pose and to answer questions such as raised in the above paragraph? Is this concept meaningful? If it is not, and I suggest that it is not, then the edifice constructed by Sontag in his essay falls.

It is first appropriate to indicate that Sontag himself is not clear concerning his essential pivotal concept *God-defending-Himself*. This ambiguity is born of placing God in the Universe coupled with confusions concerning *omnipotence*. In particular, the use of *God-defending-Himself* by Sontag is ambiguous. Examine various passages in his essay. In these passages, the concept *God-defending-Himself* is used in at least two distinct ways. One use is indicated by such phrases as "with a show of force

14 *Idem*, p. 2.

15 *Idem*, p. 4.

16 *Idem*, p. 6.

17 *Idem*, p. 6.

18 *Idem*, p. 6.

19 *Idem*, p. 7.

appropriate to the immensity...of his power,"²⁰ and "God does not use direct force in his own defense,"²¹ with the implication that God could if He but so chose. The other use of the concept *God-defending-Himself* is suggested by phrases such as "God's failure to speak out in his own defense"²² and "If God at all times spoke out with one clear voice...".²³ Let us examine closely these two uses of the concept *God-defending-Himself*, turning first to the notion of *physical force* and then to that of *speaking out*. We shall see some logically odd situations emerging.

It is at least logically odd, if not nonsensical, to claim of God -- this very powerful, if not omnipotent, Divinity -- that He needs to defend Himself in the sense of using physical force to protect Himself and His interests against some thing or another. What could "to defend" in the sense of "to protect," or "to ward off," by use of force mean when used to speak of God? Consider this situation. I say seriously to you, "Smith can defend himself against Jones." In saying this seriously, I am excluding cases such as in which Smith pumps iron but Jones is a ninety-eight pound weakling with no external means, perchance a revolver, of harming Smith. I am contending that in some way or another Jones presents a very real danger to the well-being of Smith. In such a context, to say seriously, "Smith can defend himself against Jones" is, in part, to make a prediction that if Jones were to attack Smith, Smith would be able to ward off that attack. I am predicting that Smith is able to protect himself against Jones, who is a real threat and a real match for Smith.

Yet predictions are just that -- predictions. Predictions make sense, in part, because there is always at least the logical possibility that the prediction may not turn out as expected.

20 *Idem*, p. 2.

21 *Idem*, p. 7.

22 *Idem*, p. 2.

23 *Idem*, p. 5.

Indeed my prediction may be falsified. I may be surprised by Smith. It logically could be the case -- even empirically may be the case -- that, when all is said and done, Jones has, in fact, beaten Smith to a bloody pulp. I can only understand "to defend" in such a way that there is the possibility of "not defending" in the sense of "not being able to defend" or "losing." The concept to defend is always coupled in its meaning with the concept to lose. If, logically speaking, nothing can harm me, if there is no thing, or combination of things, to which I could possibly lose, wherein lies the meaning of it is necessary to defend myself?

What of God, that individual Who, while He may not be omnipotent, is nevertheless vastly more powerful than any thing, or combination of things, in the Universe? Of this Divinity suppose we say "God can defend Himself against any thing in the Universe." In this case, what logically possible situation, given the power of God, could go against His defense? Admittedly, the sentence, "God can defend Himself against any thing in the Universe" looks very much like the sentence, "Smith can defend himself against Jones," or even more like, "Smith can defend himself against anyone in the room." Smith, however, is not omnipotent. Nor is he more powerful than any possible combination of things in the Universe. A prediction is logically meaningful concerning Smith defending himself. But the God-sentence could not be a prediction, and so it could not be any sort of factual claim about the powers and abilities of that particular individual, God. Perchance "God can defend Himself against any thing in the universe" is some sort of covert and partial characterization of the concept divinity. Or it may function as part of a definite description of that individual, God. However, neither of these is a predictive claim about the powers and abilities of God. To treat the God-sentence as if it were some sort of particular factual claim about an individual in the Universe is logically odd, precisely because there is not even the logical possibility of falsifying it.

Nor, for similar reasons, does it make sense to recommend "God *ought* to defend Himself against any thing in the universe." It is simply nonsensical to recommend seriously that someone ought to do that which is meaningless. It is not that God cannot defend Himself because He is a puny weakling. Rather given the vast power of God, there is no logical possibility of any thing, or combination of things, in the universe that could threaten Him. Therefore the recommendation, "God *ought* to defend Himself against any thing in the universe" is vacuous. The concept *God-defending-Himself*, in the sense of using physical force to protect, or ward off, a real threat is meaningless in the case of God. But to suggest that someone ought to do that which is meaningless is to make no coherent suggestion at all. That is why the specific recommendation, "God *ought* to defend Himself against any thing in the universe," is logically peculiar.

Neither does it ease matters to say, as Sontag does, that God *could* so defend Himself at a later time but simply, for reasons unknown to us, has selected not to do so now. First, at this point one runs headlong into monumental problems concerning the relation of the non-temporal nature of God to the time, however "time" is understood, of the Universe. Equally as baffling, while maintaining a traditional Christian view concerning the absolute immutability of God, are questions concerning God changing His course of action. Ignoring these problems, second, what sense can be made of saying "Then God can, and will, defend Himself against any thing in the Universe?" Once more there is not even the logical possibility that God could lose, God could not lose even if all the forces of the Universe were to combine against Him. So, to say "God can defend Himself against any thing in the Universe, now or later," if said in a factually serious way and not either as a covert characterization of the concept *divinity* or as part of a definite description of God, is to say something logically odd. Yet again, part of the criteria for meaningful use of the concept to *defend*, in the sense of to *protect* or to *ward off*, is absent. I conclude that we cannot

accept Sontag in a factually serious way when he used "force terms" in speaking of God defending Himself or His purpose. Sontag plays on the original confusions he covertly introduces in discussing the omnipotence of the Divinity. Insofar as God is not omnipotent in the traditional sense, that is insofar as something can possibly thwart His great power, it makes sense to speak of God as defending Himself, or saying that He ought to defend Himself. To the extent, however, that *nothing* is, or could be, as powerful as God is does not make sense. One cannot have it both ways.

There are various passages in the essay of Sontag that suggest a second sense of *God-defending-Himself*. What can be made of claims such as "God could defend His ways to humans but does not, or at least historically has not done so yet," or "God could make known His ways to humans but does not, or at least historically has not done so yet?" What of this second sense of *God-defending-Himself*? In this sense, the concept to *defend* is rather like saying of a person in a court of law that she or he can reasonably explain and justify to us her or his ways, actions, purposes, desires, and the like. Following this paradigm, we may speak of *God-defending-Himself* in the sense of making His ways known to us and in speaking out to us on His own behalf. Why, then, in this sense of *to defend*, does not God make clear, justify, explain, make known His desires, purposes, and so on, to us mortals? Surely His vast power, even if not omnipotent, is not merely physical force. It is also what may loosely be called "intellectual capacities" and "skills." To explore this interpretation of *God-defending-Himself*, that is making known and justifying to us His purposes, desires and so forth, consider this parallel remark: "While Godbey appears to be acting in a bit of a queer way lately, nonetheless she is able to make known to us her reasons for doing so. She could, after all, if she chooses, explain and justify her actions to us." While there are many important conditions that must be operative in order for such a claim concerning Godbey to make sense, presently

I wish to underscore only one.

If Godbey is to make known her ways to us, both we and she must accept the same standards, or conditions, that determine what is to count as meaningful use of such concepts as *knowledge*, *rational justification*, *explanation* and *understanding*. Godbey must give us what we would understand as an explanation of her actions. No matter how eloquent and, one might say, melodious are the sounds heard issuing from the mouth of Godbey, if we do not understand and accept her criteria of *explanation*, *rational justification*, *knowledge*, and so on, nor she ours, then in effect we do not hear her *speak*. In such a case, we only experience chaotic sounds, or static, of which we cannot, in a logical sense of "cannot," know anything of any possible meaning that Godbey may intend these sounds to convey. No matter how powerful, apt and skillful is the intellect of Godbey, or of us for that matter, her powers, aptness and skills are as of nothing to us. We shall each, in the end, either ignore one another or call one another fools and heretics.²⁴ The person diagnosed as paranoid is, for instance, often extremely clever and bright. Not sharing or understanding all of his/her criteria for *knowledge*, *rational justification*, *explanation*, and the like -- all of which may form a very consistent internal view by which he/she interprets reality and creates his/her world -- we call the paranoid and not ourselves, "crazy!" Yet the person diagnosed as paranoid has the same view of us.

Allow me to alter only slightly, but significantly, the example. Instead of it being the case that Godbey neither understands nor uses our criteria for applying *knowledge*, *explanation*, *rational justification*, and so on, nor we that of Godbey, consider the case in which Godbey does both understand and use *our* criteria for these concepts. Take this assumption further and imagine that Godbey does appeal to our criteria in

24 Wittgenstein, Ludwig, *On Certainty*, trans. Denis Paul and G.E.M Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1969). See, e.g., ##217 and 611.

attempting to justify and explain her actions. Still all may not go well for Godbey in her attempts. By accepting our criteria, Godbey may now find herself in the curiously self-defeating position that anything she says will go against her intended meaning in some way or another. She will always be misunderstood by us. There is nothing Godbey can say that is, as it were, unambiguously correct in the sense that we can hear, understand and know what she wants to say to us. Imagine trying to make known, explain and justify your truly kind and lovable acts to a paranoid. Anything you do, or say, is interpreted as some sort of threat. In a like manner, even though Godbey may perfectly well be always attempting to make known her ways to us, and attempting to do so in those very terms that we understand and accept, nevertheless still, like the paranoid, we cannot hear what she is saying, but only what we believe her to be saying if we believe her to be saying anything at all. Here, the difficulty rests with us and not Godbey, although from our viewpoint we might well attempt to fault Godbey. Godbey, however, cannot reasonably be faulted for lack of either trying to speak to us, or of ignoring our meanings of the very terms in which she must communicate if we are to hear her. Her frustration is a logical one. In order for her to express herself so that we shall hear, guarantees that we shall misunderstand her. In such a case, it makes no sense to speak of Godbey defending herself, as in a court of law. Nor is it appropriate to demand that she ought to defend herself.

In sum, it is logically odd to claim that Godbey defends herself in the sense of making herself known in either of the following cases. First, neither Godbey nor the person(s) she addresses understand and accept the same criteria for applying *knowledge, rational justification, explanation*, and the like. Second, while Godbey understands (she may not accept) and uses the criteria used by the other person(s) for *knowledge*, and so on, nonetheless those criteria logically preclude Godbey making herself known to the person(s) with whom she is attempting to

speak. Try as she might, and as intellectual and skillful as she might be, she cannot succeed. God is in a similar logical position in attempting to speak out to us as Godbey is in attempting to make her ways known. If God does not use our criteria for applying the concepts *knowledge, understanding, rational justification, explanation*, and the like, then it is logically impossible for us to hear Him, and for Him to manifest Himself to us. On the other hand, if God does use our criteria, then we still cannot hear Him, or, if we do, we must necessarily confuse what He is attempting to say to us.

What Sontag Should Have Asked

Sontag asks why does God, the extremely powerful Divinity wishing good in the Universe, not do something in His own defense? I have argued that this question is ambiguous because of the two ways in which the concept *God-defending-Himself* is used by Sontag. The lineage of this confusion traces back to conflated uses of *omnipotence* introduced by Sontag. Both uses of *God-defending-Himself*, I have further urged, are highly problematic. First, I have shown that *God-defending-Himself* is logically odd when understood in the sense of God employing physical force to protect, or to ward off, any sort of threat or danger to Himself. Indeed, using the assumptions Sontag makes about God, such a suggestion is meaningless. Of the two uses of *God-defending-Himself* introduced by Sontag, this is the easier of which to dispose. The second use of *God-defending-Himself*, as in court of law, is more challenging. Sontag here queries why is it that God does not defend Himself in the sense of making His ways known to us, in justifying and explaining Himself and His divine plans so that we mortals can know unambiguously who He is and what He is doing? Unfortunately, this request is also ambiguous. It may be that Sontag is wondering why God does not, in many instances, say anything at all, assuming His existence, great power and excessive good will. "...neither God's voice nor his actions are seen

or heard in the New Testament in his defense."²⁵ Why is it that God remains utterly mute? Or Sontag may be wondering why God does not say something that we mortals can understand. Presumably, in this situation and from our human viewpoint, God is talking in riddles and highly vague and ambiguous ways if He is talking at all. "Surely God could have been more explicit, and less mysterious, had he wanted to be."²⁶ But could He have been, or be, more explicit and less mysterious given our modern conceptual frames? Perhaps we could more profitably inquire why we mortals cannot know what God is saying when He speaks, as it were, in our own language, using our own conceptual frames. Perhaps the problem is not with God speaking but rather with us hearing. Here the focus and stress of the problem is shifted from God to us.

Sontag oscillates between the muteness of God and His ambiguity. In both cases wrong questions are raised by Sontag. The question that should be posed is "Why is it that we humans cannot hear God?" The response I am suggesting is this:

Given our modern conceptual frames, that are the only ones that God could possibly use to communicate with us, we mortals who dwell in these frames cannot possibly know what God is saying. We cannot make sense out of what it would be to claim that we could know what God is saying. Indeed we cannot even know that He is saying anything at all.

This response is itself couched in unclear terms. For instance, what is to be understood by *conceptual frame* and related concepts such as *language*, *communication* and *knowledge*? These concerns point out that any reply to the query, "Why does God not talk so that we mortals can know what He is saying?" is going to be multifaceted in nature.

Nonetheless, one essential element of a response has already been proposed. If God is going to communicate with us, He must use symbols in a conceptual frame accepted and understood by us. He must speak in such a way that we can recognize it as rational

25 Sontag, p. 2.

26 *Idem*, p. 3.

speech and know what He is saying. It can only be, for us and from our perspective, in such a conceptual frame that God can manifest Himself to us. Only then can we possibly know that it is He who is speaking and be able to know what it is that He is saying.

Consider an example similar to that of Godbey attempting to make her loving ways, intentions, actions, and the like, known to a paranoid.²⁷ Imagine an adult attempting to explain some complicated concept to a young child. The burden of the success of this attempt lies with the adult, we might reason. Or what of a professor trying to clarify some abstract theses to a beginning student. Once more, we imagine that the burden of the attempt rests on the more knowledgeable and experienced person. Is it not reasonable to have the same expectations of God as we do of the adult and the professor? Yet there are important underlying assumptions made in both the case of the adult and the professor that may not be as reasonable to make in the case of God and us. It is assumed that the adult and the child, the professor and the student, already have a great deal in common. First, they all have similar bodies; they all grasp common physical gestures, facial expressions, tones of voice, and so on. Second, they all speak the same language to the extent that they speak at all, although on different levels of comprehension. Indeed, they all share, to some degree or another, an interlaced common conceptual and biological framework. Third, it is assumed that the child, or the student, is paying attention and desires to hear and understand what is being said. Only against a background, a gestalt, of these and other related assumptions, can we place the burden upon the adult and the professor. We again come to the core of our difficulties. The very conceptual frame that is historically, and overwhelmingly, employed to establish western thought since at least the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries

27 I am indebted to Charles S. Milligan for this example and that of the professor and student.

logically precludes our knowing God and what He says.²⁸ Widely accepted, and popular views of what constitutes *knowledge* and *nature*, or *reality*, put us in a position like the paranoid to whom Godbey attempts to speak. Only the conceptual distance between God and us is far more radical given the more radical differences holding, in the traditional Christian view, between God and His creation.²⁹

Within what I call "Tinker Toy Epistemology" -- an epistemic frame in which *knowledge* is understood in terms of the concepts *certain*, *objective*, *non-personal*, *analysis*, *rule-governed*, and *value-free* -- it is impossible to imagine that any sense can be attached to *knowledge of God defending Himself*.³⁰ Problems and paradoxes become even more pronounced when Tinker Toy Epistemology is coupled with its sibling, Tinker Toy Metaphysics. Here *reality* is understood in terms of *fact*, and *fact* is spelt out in terms of concepts like *atomic*, *independent*, *context-free*, and *value-free*.³¹ In this sort of conceptual frame, all that can be known are facts in the world, or facts "put together" into compounds by the imposition of some rules or another. Now, *pace* Sontag, to say that God is not in the Universe is to declare that

28 Elements of this conceptual frame are traceable to the presocratics. However, a unique turn was given to the concept *nature* beginning with Copernicus and leading through Newton. Descartes, on the other hand, gave an equally unique twist to the concept *knowledge*. See also:

Harrison, III, Frank R., "Epistemic Frames and Eschatological Stories," in *The Return of the Millennium*, eds. Joseph Bettis and S. K. Johanneses (Barrytown, New York: New ERA Books, 1984), pp. 62-71.

29 Given the position of Sontag that God is *in* the Universe, it is difficult to access the weight of this criticism. To the extent that the Divinity is anthropomorphized, the criticism becomes that much weaker. But, then, the concept *Divinity* becomes that much further removed from the traditional Christian view.

30 Harrison, III, Frank R., "On Hearing God," in *The Defense of God*. [See above: Footnote #1], pp. 70-72.

31 *Idem*, pp. 72-74.

God is not such a fact. This entails that no sense can be made of any of the following when presented as particular knowledge claims: "God exists," "God is omnipotent," "God is good," "God wants us to love one another," "God intends His creation to prosper," and the like. And certainly there is absolutely nothing that God could either say or do, even supposing all of the great powers of force, intellect and skill attributed to Him, that we could know and understand as God manifesting Himself to us. Any such attempt on His part must necessarily appear to us as only another fact in the Universe. For those dwelling within the conceptual frame Tinker Toy Epistemology and Metaphysics, God must necessarily vanish, for them, into meaninglessness. This is, of course, not to say that God vanishes. It is to underscore that He necessarily must vanish from those who dwell in a particular conceptual frame and establish a world in terms of that frame. Sontag does not appear to appreciate the logical gravity of *this* thicket. And, hence, he is not in a position to suggest a way out of his own concerns. The confusion for Sontag begins in his leading question, "Why does not the Divinity speak to us in a clear, unambiguous way?" I have, however, proposed that the leading question ought to be, "Why is it that we cannot hear God speaking?"

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