PANNENBERG ON VERIFICATION IN THEOLOGY: AN EPISTEMIC RESPONSE

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In his *Theology and the Philosophy of Science*, Wolfhart Pannenberg develops a vigorous articulation of theology as a science.[1] The scientific status of theology derives from his contention that we treat theological assertions as verifiable hypotheses:

> The requirement that theological statements must be verifiable is impossible to evade...[E]very utterance intended as an assertion must be subject to verification against the relevant state of affairs and the state of affairs must be accessible and distinct from the assertion and capable of being compared with it...It follows that *every* assertion necessarily has the logical structure of a hypothesis (TPS 331).

In what follows, I explain and evaluate Pannenberg's view of verification in theology. First, I sketch his idea of theology as a science and then describe his understanding of verification. I conclude by identifying some problems that weaken his account of verification.

THE SCIENTIFIC STATUS OF THEOLOGY

God constitutes the proper object of theology for Pannenberg; hence he defines theology as the "science of God."[2] Modern theology, urges Pannenberg, takes the reality of God, the thematic reference-point of its inquiry, as *problematic*, rather than axiomatic (TPS 299; NTS 12). In other words, theology approaches God only as a problem and not as fact. Accordingly, "the openness and inconclusive state of the question of God is

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totally necessary to anyone who professes an informed concern with the legacy of the theological tradition" (TPS 299).

Pannenberg describes God as the "all determining reality" in several places (TPS 382ff, 283). Although he allows for our apprehending God directly, he stresses that theological reflection accesses God only *indirectly* (TPS 389; NTS 13). To qualify as a genuine science,[3] theology must realize intersubjective "validity"; this condition, in Pannenberg's opinion, obtains only when theological knowledge relates to and renders intelligible our self-understanding of experience. More narrowly, we achieve intersubjectivity and self-understanding through linguistic (reflexive) expressions that illumine our world, and Pannenberg classifies this expressive means as indirect. We encounter the reality of God as experientially "co-given" through other objects. Consequently

> Because theology, as an attempt to obtain knowledge, seeks intersubjectivity, it too must direct its attention to this indirect way in which the divine reality is co-given, to the 'traces' of the divine mystery in the things of the world and in our own lives (TPS 301).

As the reality that determines everything, residua of God inhere, Pannenberg hypothesizes, in *all objects* (NTS 16). Although Pannenberg believes that his definition of God implies this hypothesis, he insists that it still requires substantiation: "everything must be shown to be determined by [God's] reality and to be ultimately unintelligible without it" (TPS 382; NTS 12). We can, according to Pannenberg, confirm traces of divine reality in existing objects *only* as they stand in continuous relation to each other:

> [Thus] theology as the science of God would mean the study of the totality of the real from the point of view of the reality which ultimately determines it both as a whole and in its parts (TPS 303).

In no place, however, do we presently find the totality of reality as finished (TPS 311). Rather, Pannenberg sees reality "as a process still continuing" (NTS 13). In what "form," then, does the totality of reality exist, according to Pannenberg? We *anticipate* the whole of reality "as a totality of meaning...without which...no experience is possible at all" (TPS 311). Pannen-

berg stresses that we achieve the perception and unity of meaning contextually, and, moreover, that there exists a universal semantic whole: "Every specialized meaning depends on a final all-embracing totality of meaning in which all individual meanings are linked to form a semantic whole" (TPS 216; cf. NTS 14). The expression of our anticipated meanings has an historical character that concerns Pannenberg's conception of theology.

Pannenberg defines religion as "the place in which experience of the self-revelation of God or divine reality in general is articulated in the totality of reality of the world..." (TPS 313). God's reality resides in semantic models presupposed in every particular experience and becomes known historically (TPS 310-11). Thus Pannenberg views religion as an "historical phenomenon" (NTS 16). Religious claims derive from our experience, which is historical; and theology founds its hypotheses upon the assertions of religions. More narrowly, Pannenberg identifies historical religions as the source of our anticipated meanings about divine reality: "the historical religions...must be regarded as the expressions of the experience of divine reality within the totality of meaning of experienced reality" (TPS 313). And the discourse of meaning implicit within individual and (especially) social experiences "becomes explicit in [historical] religions" (NTS 14, 16). Note that Pannenberg considers our experience of God's reality as intersubjective *solely* within a social context. And, finally, theology, as the science of God, represents the science of the historical religions, and not the science of religion *per se*.

Christian theology, for instance, scientifically investigates its own theological hypotheses.[4] The study of specific religions is theological to the degree that such traditions exhibit the "co-givenness" of divine reality (TPS 301-2). And the science of theology analyzes religious claims as anticipatory expressions of reality and *explicates* these claims as expressions of God's self-communication. Pannenberg regards such claims as "hypotheses to be tested by the full range of currently accessible experience" (TPS 315).

"Theological reflection," asserts Pannenberg, "deals explicitly with the cognitive element in [historical] expressions of faith..." (NTS 13). Pannenberg underscores that modern theology can no longer retreat to some uncritical "authoritative norm," be it one of *magesterium*, biblicism, or the "eyes of faith" (Pannenberg, 1971: 48-54; Cf. TPS 330, NTS 9). Theology's prospective vindication as a science requires an embrace of critico-rational tools. Hence he champions theology and free, rational inquiry as allies, rather than adversaries.

Confirming and falsifying hypotheses form an integral part of scientific inquiry; Pannenberg argues, therefore, that we can and must subject theological assertions, which exhibit "the logical structure of a [hypotheses]," (TPS 331; NTS 8), to techniques of verification.[5] Moreover, he asserts that God's reality reveals itself in global models of meaning, and the historico-linguistic nature of these semantic models means that we can refute or confirm these models experientially. At best, however, we attain only provisional corroboration of theological assertions:

> It is quite a different question, however, whether such verification can ever be brought to a final conclusion, negative or positive...The peculiar difficulty of making a *final* [emphasis added] judgment in the case of...theological statements arises from the fact that such statements have to do with reality as a whole...with the totality of its temporal process...[I]t is only the end of all history which can bring a final decision about all [theological] claims about reality as a whole and therefore in relation to the reality of God...(TPS 343).

Let us see how the character of both language and history contribute to the objectivity of theology.

Pannenberg locates the objectifying element of language in its "representational" function:

> In the [linguistic] statement, the speaker distinguishes his [or her] own subjectivity as a content which has an indentity in itself and can therefore be communicated to others and understood by them as having that identity (TPS 168).

Language allows us to differentiate "the object of a statement from that statement itself"; language, then, inherently dis-

tinguishes "the subject matter to which a sentence refers from the medium of language that serves to apprehend it" (NTS 10). Hence Pannenberg's hermeneutic, in contrast to Gadamer's, affirms the "element of objectification...as a fundamental element of language itself" (TPS 168). This epistemic distance between asserter and asserted "content", enables Pannenberg to claim a sense of objectivity for theology, and , in part, establish its scientific character.

Pannenberg's defending theology as a science also depends heavily on the interrelation theology and history. He argues that claims regarding God's reality, revelation, and action admit of no verification *via* their objects. Rather, the implications of theological assertions, like the claims of history, accommodate verification (TPS 332). So we test theological statements through "an examination of the consequences that can be derived from them" (NTS 12). Pannenberg stresses that the states of affairs to which we subject these implications are historical in type. But theological knowledge

> differs [from historical knowledge] in not being primarily interested in establishing a past phenomenon as a fact. It takes this for granted, and then looks for the appearance in the phenomenon of the all-determining reality which also reveals itself as such in present experience (TPS 338).

Theology investigates God's manifestation in historical phenomena by analyzing the semantic whole attendant in the phenomena. And the historical nature of these models that we anticipate, allegedly legitimizes theological claims as confirmable or falsifiable. Specifically, the objectivity and truth of theological statements depends upon their corresponding to relevant criteria:

> It is undeniable that truth as correspondence depends on (at least the presumption of) an intersubjective consensus about the states of affairs [criteria] which is an essential part of its objectivity (TPS 41, n. 62).

Objectivity and meaning characterize theological assertions to the degree that they correspond to reality. Pannenberg proposes that we examine theological statements about God to determine

> whether their content is really of determinative significance for all-finite reality as it is available to our experience.

> If this be so, then nothing real can be fully understood in its particular reality without reference to the presumed God; one should expect...that the presumed reality of God opens up a deeper understanding of all reality. To the degree that this is the case, one can speak of corroboration or confirmation of theological assertions (NTS 12).

The pertinent criteria through which we verify theological assertions "must be accessible and distinct from the assertion and capable of being compared with it" (TPS 331). Finally, Pannenberg develops a contextualist scheme of verification; assertions pertain to a "framework of theoretical networks, and can be verified only by reference to their function in the system of theoretical frameworks" (TPS 332).

Accordingly, Pannenberg classifies both *Geisteswissenschaften* (human sciences) *Naturwissenschaften* (natural or physical sciences) as objective. Following Popper, he rejects the early positivist *credo* that we can verify assertions by reducing them to "protocol sentences" or direct empirical observation (TPS 334; NTS 8, 18) and, consequently, the demarcation of natural science as cognitive (objective) versus human science as non-cognitive (subjective). Contrastingly, Pannenberg regards religious language as "cognitively" meaningful because the "reality it asserts is accessible independently of it" (TPS 328). So the science of theology supposedly deals with hypotheses that we can test against legitimate, independent criteria.

Given that theology, as the science of God, investigates the entirety of the real in relation to that which occasions all, Pannenberg singles out *unity* as an important object of verification:

> Theology examines the historical religions to determine how far the all-determining reality of God makes itself known as the unifying unity of all reality distinct from itself (TPS 327).

Pannenberg also identifies *integration* as a criterion of verification: we measure religious claims for their capacity "to integrate the continuosly changing experience of reality" (NTS 15; Cf. TPS 315). One final object of verification emerges from Pannenberg's asking, "Does it [a particular religious tradition] ...provide an interpretive approach to reality which gives

insights into the way it is experienced in practice?" (TPS 320). In other words, we evaluate a particular religious tradition's claims about God for their ability to *interpret* and/or *explain* reality (NTS 15). In conclusion, then, unity, integration, and illuminative explanatory power comprise the *conditio sine qua non* in Pannenberg's idea of verification.

Evaluation

The claim that *'we can verify theological assertions against relevant states of affairs'* becomes the basis for Pannenberg's articulation of theology as a science. Some inconsistencies, however, impair the coherence of Pannenberg's approach to the idea. Let me address these difficulties.

Pannenberg's characterization of verifiability suffers from semantic carelessness. And a careful semantic analysis seems warranted, rather than pedantic, given the plethora of competing meanings that litters the history of the verification principle. As I see it, Pannenberg offers a vague (imprecise) definition of verification:

> I agree with those who have spoken of verification in a broader and less precise sense, referring to a corroboration of hypotheses by all appropriate means of testing them (NTS 18).

In *Theology and the Philosophy of Science,* we find the following account of testing:

> [A]ssertions about the real world can also be *tested* [emphasis added] by their ability to unify and interpret all the relevant aspects of the material with which they [the assertions] are concerned (TPS 67).

In this last excerpt, Pannenberg appears to equate *tested* with *verified.* These statements represent Pannenberg's most straightforward description of verification.

This vagueness, I believe, derives from Pannenberg's defining verification as the corroboration of hypotheses *'by all appropriate means of testing'* or by the capacity of an assertion *'to unify and interpret all the relevant aspects.'*

Specifically, the definiendum *verification,* as explained by Pannenberg, denotes a hopelessly broad logical extension: *'all*

appropriate means of testing.' Similarly, the definiendum *tested* denotes the unrestricted logical extension of an assertion's unifying and interpreting *'all relevant aspects of material'* that it concerns. A basic question naturally arises here: Are the appropriate means of testing assertions empirical, logical, consequential, or eschatological in type? Maybe verification involves each means of testing. I respect Pannenberg's honest admission that he expresses a broad, imprecise idea of verification. He fails, however, to help us grasp a workable, precise, and rationally accessible sense of verification. I think that Pannenberg's account of the term requires more precision.

Pannenberg recognizes the importance of our working out criteria for *provisionally* verifying and, hence, adopting one worldview over another. He, nonetheless, implicity endorses John Hick's idea of eschatological verification:[6]

> John Hick and I.M. Crombie believe that while religious and theological statements are verifiable in principle, only the eschatological future can settle their verification. An important part of this view is that it is only the end of all history which can bring a final decision about all claims about reality as a whole and therefore in relation to the reality of God and [our] destiny...(TPS 343).

Yet this tacit acceptance of eschatological verification militates against the idea of theological assertions as *intersubjectively* "valid" now.

Intersubjectively "valid" truths occupy a central place in Pannenberg's view of verification (TPS 313). Truth as correspondence rests upon "intersubjective consensus" regarding an assertion's relevant states of affairs (TPS 41). Ultimately, though, Pannenberg defers to eschatology:

> Every creature receives through [Jesus] as the eschatological judge its ultimate illumination, its ultimate place, its ultimate definition in the course of the whole creation (Pannenberg, 1968: 391).

How can the *eschatological* verification of a theological assertion qualify as "intersubjectively valid" to *presently-living* inquirers? Experiencing the *eschaton* seems private in character, not public.

Nothing self-inconsistent thwarts the idea that a community of inquirers who experience the *eschaton* can intersubjectively validate religious assertions; the idea is logically possible. But *'presently-living persons'* and *'persons experiencing the eschaton'* represent mutually exclusive classes. That is, I consider it a logical impossibility that an individual can concomitantly belong to the class of *'presently living persons'* and the class of *'persons who experience the eschaton.'* Consequently, Pannenberg's avowal of eschatological verification conflicts with his claim that we presently-living inquirers can "intersubjectively validate" theological assertions.

Consider the Pannenbergian hypothesis that I shall call sentence E: " [O]nly the end of all history...can bring a final decision about all claims about reality as a whole and therefore in relation to the reality of God and the destiny of [each person]." Surely Pannenberg would classify this sentence as an assertion or hypothesis. But does this specific claim fulfill the *proviso* that Pannenberg sets forth for every intended assertion?

Remember that every intended assertion "must be subject to verification" against germane and *accessible* states of affairs (TPS 331). An interesting paradox results when we analyze sentence E with this criterion. In no way can presently-living individuals access relevant criteria that ultimately enable them to confirm or falsify Pannenberg's hypothesis. Only those who experience the *eschaton* will access those states of affairs that pertain to sentence E. To most presently-living individuals who cannot access ultimate, eschatological states of affairs, sentence E fails to satisfy the criterion that, according to Pannenberg's prescription, every assertion must meet.

Objectivity, in part, confers scientific status upon academic disciplines; and Pannenberg develops an original and interesting notion of objectivity for theology. Pannenberg bases the objectivity of theological assertions primarily upon two criteria: the representational function of language and the correspondence of a theological assertion's "content" to its relevant

states of affairs. Some problems present in these criteria impair the coherence of objectivity that Pannenberg develops.

The "representational function" inherent in language, argues Pannenberg, imparts an "element of objectivity" upon statements that we assert (TPS 168). Objectivity occurs in statements because a speaker "distinguishes" the expressed content of an assertion from his or her own subjectivity. The representational function of language presupposes this inherent condition of detachment.

Moreover, Pannenberg's hermeneutic implies that the language's representational function establishes, on its accord, the objectivity of every assertion. David McKenzie makes this point in the following way:

> [Pannenberg objects that] Gadamer in effect rejects the "objectifying function" of language; he [Gadamer] does not account for the way in which the speaker distinguishes the content of the assertion from his or her own subjectivity. If we allow for the crucial role of the assertion even in the *Geisteswissenschaften*, and note that to assert is to objectify in the sense above, it becomes arbitrary to distinguish history, philosophy, and theology from the natural sciences by reference to the objective/subjective distinction (McKenzie, 1980: 56).

Does the representational function of language confer objectivity upon assertions?

Taken by itself, I must answer no. The representational function of language is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition that insures an assertion's objectivity. Suppose, for instance, that I express the following statement: *'I feel remorse and sadness when I imagine how John Huss was martyred at the Council of Constance in 1415.'* In expressing this statement, I do "distinguish" the "content" of my assertion from myself as the agent that expressed it. But merely this condition of "distinguishing" fails to make my statement objective. The content of my statement describes *private* mental and emotional states that no external agent can directly experience or verify. Objectivity requires some defensible means cf public (intersubjective) verification. Even if we could *supplement* the representational function of language with some intersubjective test, our objectifying

my statement would seem a remote possibility at best. The "content" of the statement itself remains decidedly non-cognitive in type. In short, we find no guarantor of an assertion's objectivity in the representational function of language.

We do not encounter the entirety of reality as complete, according to Pannenberg. He argues, however, that God's reality manifests itself in "subjective anticipations of the totality of reality, in models of the totality of meaning presupposed in all particular experience" (TPS 311). Theology investigates the historical religions; and, moreover, the historical character of both anticipation and these models means that theologians must adduce historical support for hypotheses they express. More specifically, the science of theology checks the "content" of assertions expressed in "subjective anticipations of reality" or "models of meaning" against their related states of affairs. This position leads to some problems about verification.

Problem one: Through what realistic, feasibly employable test can we intersubjectively confirm or falsify a "subjective anticipation of the totality of reality?" Genuine hypotheses, whether they concern particular events or natural laws, yield test-implications that allow for meaningful testing. Quite simply, such an "anticipation" seems decidedly too vast, intricate and remote to actually test experientially. "Subjective anticipations" about the reality's whole yield no such test-implications. Accordingly, we cannot construe them as genuine scientific hypotheses subject to verification. Such global subjective anticipations lack verificational import.

Problem two: What particular, useful, and feasible test-*procedures* result from Pannenberg's describing verification as "corroboration...by all appropriate means of testing?" The absence of feasible corroborative procedures, much like the absence of test-implications, renders intersubjective verification a remote possibility. Again, Pannenberg's unrestrictedly general and vague idea of verification fails us here. A rationally defensible concept of verification requires that he *specify* a prospectus of possible testing procedures, be they empirico-

inductive, theoretico-deductive, or simply logical in type.

Problem three: Why does Pannenberg approach subjective anticipations as potentially objective in nature? According to Pannenberg, we *objectify* our *subjective* anticipations of reality through experiential verification. His position invites the charge of paradox here: the terms *subjective* and *anticipation* connote intensions private rather than public in type. *Subjective*, in this context refers to individually conditioned experience or knowledge. *Anticipation* refers to an individual's foreseeing, prior to an event actuality or temporal occurrence. Hence each term stands in tension to the intersubjective intension connoted by the word *objective*.

Problem four: Why does Pannenberg violate the common scientific canon of simplicity in his expressing the hypothesis that God's reality presents itself in our subjective anticipation of reality's whole? Again, anticipations about the whole of reality would entail a virtually infinite number and variety of discrete basal assumptions. This multiplies entities cumbersomely and violates the scientific community's preference for parsimonious theories. Clearly, simple hypotheses possess greater verificational import than more complex ones.

Doxology, according to Pannenberg, essentially means adoration in which we praise God. And theology, he tells us, speaks about God only in doxological fashion:

> Only in the attitude of adoration can God be spoken of in a theological manner. Therefore, the structure of doxology is characteristic of even the conceptual form of *all* [emphasis added] statements about God's essence. The creaturely content of our concepts is sacrificed when goodness, righteousness, love, wisdom, etc., are ascribed to the eternal essence of God. This means, with regard to the concepts themselves, that they *become equivocal* [emphasis added] in the act of transferring their finite contents to the eternal essence of God... "They are a mode of expression in which the worshipper brings himself [or herself]...words, and consistency of...thought as a sacrifice or praise to God." They cannot be directly employed as premises for drawing our logical consequences. Otherwise, the fallacy of four terms (*quaterno terminorum*) results, since, indeed, the finite conceptual content has become equivocal in the doxological act of its assertion about the eternal essence of God (Pannenberg, 1970; 203).

I believe that the doxological character of theological language jeopardizes Pannenberg's idea of verification, the objectivity of language, and involves him in some related contradictions.

This doxological character of any assertion that attributes some quality to God's essence, renders that concept (quality) equivocal in meaning! Pannenberg, for instance, ascribes "'futurity as a quality of [God's] being'" (Pannenberg 1977: 55). Now in ascribing some property to God's *being*, Pannenberg ascribes a property to God's *essence*. Futurity, a finite temporal concept, takes on an equivocal meaning when ascribed to God's essence. How, then, can anyone legitimately verify the assertion '*futurity is a quality of God's essence*,' when the meaning of futurity becomes equivocal? (We could levy the same reasoning at Pannenberg's description of God as the all-determining reality as well.)

Following Heinrich Scholz, Pannenberg sees the cognitive character of theological language as integral to theology's scientific character (TPS 326ff); NTS 6-8). Pannenberg uses two conditions in affirming the cognitively meaningful character of theological assertions: we subject theological assertions to "verification against relevant states of affairs," and we access such states of affairs apart from their assertions. The presence of equivocal terms, however, sacrifices the intelligibility of an intended assertion. An inquirer cannot thereby verify the "content" of any assertion against "relevant states of affairs," if the meaning of the assertion's content remains indeterminate. And, hence the prospectively corresponding states of affairs remain indeterminate as well. The equivocity, then of doxological sentences precludes the verificational import and cognitively meaningful nature of theological assertion for which Pannenberg argues:

> 1. If the conceptual content of doxological sentences about God's essence are equivocal, then such sentences fail to qualify as cognitively meaningful assertions; and if the conceptual content of doxological sentences about God's essence are equivocal, then such sentences admit of no experiential verification.

2. The conceptual content of doxological sentences about God's essence are equivocal.

3. Therefore such sentences fail to qualify as cognitively meaningful assertions and admit of no experiential verification.

The problems that this doxological thesis inspires unfortunately continue. Pannenberg holds, like Scholz, that theology should not and cannot "escape the claims of logic" (NTS 7); "assertions about states of affairs [involve]...logic" (TPS 331). The logical structure of theological assertions requires that: the principles of contradiction and identity be observed and that propositions are logically compatible (TPS 331). Now let's analyze these considerations with respect to Pannenberg's doxological thesis.

Doxological sentences represent a "mode of expression" in which the worshiper sacrifices "the consistency of his [or her] thought." When we assert claims about God's being, we cannot both sacrifice consistency of thought and observe the principle of contradiction. The doxological structure of essential statement about God and the logical nature of assertions *per se* appear irreconcilable in Pannenberg's thought. Our sacrificing "consistency of thought" resembles a retreat to some uncritical "authoritative norm."

One final implication of doxology merits our scrutiny. Doxological statements, Pannenberg tells us, "cannot be directly employed as premises for drawing our logical consequences," without committing the fallacy of four terms. Now the term *directly* strikes me as vague; surely Pannenberg would disallow our using doxological assertions indirectly -- as an implicit premise in an *enthymeme*. So I interpret Pannenberg as saying that we cannot employ doxological formulations as explicit premises in arguments.

In my estimation, Pannenberg does use doxological formulations for inferring logical consequences. In *Theology and the Kingdom of God,* for instance, he identifies God's rule and being: "[God's] rule and [God's] being are inseparable" (Pannenberg,

1969: 56). To assert the identity of God's rule and being constitutes a "doxological formulation." Pannenberg then argues

> Since [God's] rule and [God's] being are inseparable, God's being is still in the process of coming to be (Pannenberg, 1969: 56).

The identity of God's rule and being functions as a premise for Pannenberg's concluding that process describes God's nature, as understood from our finite perspective.[7] Pannenberg contradictorily derives a logical consequence from a doxological assertion.

Theology has God, the all-determining reality, as its proper object and attempts to verify this hypothesis experientially "on its own implications." More narrowly, Pannenberg describes God as "the power determining the future of all that is present" (Pannenberg, 1969: 56). He views the "present as an *effect* [emphasis added] of the future, in contrast to the conventional assumption that the past and present are the cause of the future" (Pannenberg, 1969: 56).

Lewis Ford aptly calls Pannenberg's idea the "retroactive power of the future upon the past" (Ford, 1977: 308). In my opinion, Pannenberg fails to provide an exacting, unambiguous explication of what future causality means; hence we cannot restrict the idea to one definitive meaning. Several excerpts, however, suggest that future causality refers to *efficient* causality. That a future agency of power can produce present effects is, I think, dubious. So, derivatively, the possibility of our verifying God as the all-determining reality would seem unlikely.

The word *determines* relates directly to our discussion; vagueness surrounds Pannenberg's use of it. Nonetheless, when Pannenberg understands the present as an "*effect*" of the future, *determines* implies efficient causality. Pannenberg asks a question that underscores this interpretation: "How can the [world's] physical finite entities be understood as having been created by God whose power is the eschatological future?" (Pannenberg, 1969: 64). God's creating extended finite things seems tantamount to God's *producing* extended finite things. God, says Pannenberg, "*places* [emphasis added] finite reality into being"

(Pannenberg, 1969: 61). Although the intension of future causality may involve other meanings, the cited remarks seemingly imply the idea of efficient causality. Now what are we to make of this position?

The assertion *'God, the power of the future, produces present temporal effects,'* I take as untenable.[8] Admittedly, the assertion appears *logically* possible, but that hardly qualifies it (or any assertion) as rationally defensible. Contrastively, the retroactive power of the future, wherein future causes produce present temporal effects, seems *physically* impossible.[9] In other words, the condition of a future agent's occasioning a temporally present effect violates our *actual*-world understanding of efficient causality. Moreover, we find no *accessible* paradigmatic states of affairs in our actual world that correspond to the idea of a future cause that produces present effects. Accordingly, we cannot subject Pannenberg's claim to any means of verification.

In defense of Pannenberg, we can constructively interpret the power of the future and its "determining" the present somewhat differently. Employing Pannenberg's terminology, we might say that our anticipations of God, as the power of the future, can influence the character of our experience. Note, though, that our anticipations -- as cognitive events of the temporal present -- influence whatever choices we make. Thus when we anticipate the future, our *present* anticipatory power influences the *subsequent* character of our experience.

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NTS _____"The Nature of a Theological Statement." *Zygon* 7 (March 1972). pp. 6-19.

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NOTES

1. Pannenberg's use of the term *science* includes both the human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften)* and natural sciences (*Naturswissenschaften)*. The logical extension of *science* thus denotes human sciences like literature and philosophy, social sciences like history and anthropology, *and* natural sciences like chemistry and physics (TPS 72ff, 116-135). English-speaking thinkers occasionally view Pannenberg's classification of theology as a science with an intially naive skepticism that derives from their restricting the extension of *science* to the so-called physical sciences.

2. Pannenberg's essay "Toward a Theology of the History of Religions," (Pannenberg, 1971: 65-118) represents his earliest formal consideration of theology's scientific character. (He delivered the essay at Berlepsch in 1962 and later published a revised version in *Basic Questions in Theology.*)

3. Pannenberg appeals to Heinrich Scholz's "undisputed minimum requirements" as an *initially* "valid" foundation of a science (TPS 326ff):

    1. The propositional postulate: scientific assertions should possess a cognitive (i.e., objective) character.

    2. The postulate of coherence: scientific sentences should be free from contradictions.

    3. The postulate of unity: science's subject-matter should form a unified area.

    Pannenberg holds that Scholz's requirements, however useful, need to be refined and supplemented.

4. Pannenberg judges Christian theological hypotheses as "unsubstantiated" if the following conditions obtain:

    1. they are intended as hypotheses about the implications of the Isralite-Christian faith but cannot be shown to express implications of biblical traditions (even when changes in experience are allowed for);

    2. they have no connection with reality as a whole which is cashable in terms of present experience and can be shown to be so by its relation to the current state of philosophical enquiry (in this case theological statements are transferred to the critical categories of mythical, legendary, and ideological);

    3. they are incapable of being integrated with the appropriate area of experience or no attempt is made to integrate them (e.g. in the doctrine of the church as it relates to the church's role in society)

    4. their explanatory force is inadequate to the stage reached in theological discussion, i.e. when it does not equal the interpretive force of existing hypotheses and does not overcome limitations of these which emerge in discussion (TPS 344-45).

5. Pannenberg describes *verification* in the following way: "...I agree with those who have spoken of verification in a broader and less precise sense, referring to a corroboration of all hypotheses by all appropriate means of testing them" (NTS 18).

6. William Blackstone offers an effective critique of eschatological verification in *The Problem of Religious Knowledge* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1963). Kai Neilsen also analyzes eschatological verification in his "Eschatological Verification," *Canadian Journal of Philoso-*

phy 9 (1963) 287-91.

7. Pannenberg's idea of God engages some motifs of process theism at this juncture. Pannenberg applauds Whitehead's and Hartshorne's "incorporating time into the idea of God... as an enormous achievement" Pannenberg, 1969: 62). Yet he "cannot agree when Whitehead suggests that the futurity of God's kingdom implies a development in God" (Ibid.). From our finite vantage point, process seemingly characterizes the being of God. Taken in and of itself, however, Pannenberg maintains that God's being undergoes no development. [Cf. "A Theological Conversation with Wolfhart Pannenberg." *Dialog 11* (1972), p. 294.) Some confusion obscures Pannenberg's position here.

8. Lewis Ford rejects the idea of a future efficient cause:

   The future is just as causally effective as the past, though each in its own way. This would be denied on the ordinary assumption that causes produce their effects, for all productive agency must be vested in actualities, and there can be no future actualities...The power of the future does not reside in some future actuality. This is a contradiction in terms if, in our freedom, we face a genuinely open future, such that nothing is actual until it has been actualized in the present. Moreover, it is not as if this awaited actuality first exerts power when it becomes actual in the present. For any power it exerted then would be the power of the past or present, not the power of the future (Ford, 1978: 36-7).

9. Note that a "state of affairs is physically possible...if its description is *consistent with* the natural laws of the actual world" (Bradley and Swartz, 1978: 6).