

CHAPTER ONE

A MODEL OF DIVINE IMMANENCE

The question of the existence of God or of an ontologically superior reality or ground of being is far from settled for many people. Some claim to have proved the existence of God. But these proofs are far from convincing to many people who have examined the arguments carefully. There are serious difficulties with all of the major types of argument for the existence of God. Each makes a leap over a gap in the argument at a crucial point. We need not rehearse the standard criticisms of these approaches. We need merely say that these criticisms have never been decisively silenced. Their persistence suggests serious weaknesses in the philosophical arguments for the existence of God.

Appeal to revelation or religious authority is also open to objection. To accept a revelation or authority as genuine is already to affirm the reality of God. Why should we accept the claim of one revelation over that of another? The Qu'rān seems as self-authenticating as does the Bible. The Baha'u'llah has credentials at least as good as any other alleged bearer of revelation.

Still others claim that belief must be a matter of a leap of faith, a personal decision. But why leap into faith? Why not leap toward a denial of God or why leap at all? Granted that reasons can be given for belief, these reasons are open to dispute and are far from convincing to many people who have examined them.

If there is no God or analogous reality, is there anything left to believe in? It is the writer's contention that there is a third alternative to the dichotomy between theism and secular humanism. The purpose of this book is to explore the possibility of this alternative, to sketch a philosophy of religious naturalism with a minimal model of the immanent divine.

On the one hand some people make a bold assertion of the full ontological status of the Divine. This is based on one of a number of maximal models of divinity which underly both traditional theism

and many contemporary revisions of theism. On the other hand there is skeptical disbelief in such a bold assertion. In between these two positions, largely unnoticed save by a few thinkers, there is room for an affirmation of a minimal degree of transcendence. If a strong assertion is hard to defend, then perhaps a more cautious and more restrained model will be better able to answer the doubts of our age while providing some of the support and prophetic criticism which the traditions have offered. Perhaps a minimal model of transcendence can provide a genuine alternative to the choice between a doubtful maximal model and total secular humanism. If belief in God is abandoned, we are not left to our own resources. It is not true, as Nietzsche claimed, that if the absence of God is recognized we would be as if unhooked from our sun, condemned to plunge aimlessly in a meaningless universe.

1. The Model Elaborated

This minimal model is offered as a way of thinking about certain realities which provide resources of healing and criticism so badly needed today. The secular viewpoint tends to obscure these realities and renders us insensitive to them. The maximal models of divinity, on the other hand, expose these realities to the acids of disbelief and thus make an appropriation of their resources more difficult. This minimal model is an attempt to illuminate these resources without making excessive and counterproductive statements about them.

This minimal model may not provide a permanently satisfying standpoint for many people. Perhaps it takes a type of maturity to accept the fact that we see as if in a glass, darkly. However, for some of those who are laboring to recover or to keep from losing the sense of a transcendent dimension to life, this minimal model may provide at least a temporary campsite in the ascent of their spiritual mountain. For others, it may provide a more permanent, if restrained, way of thinking about the transcendent factors in our life.

At any rate, this model is an attempt at clarity as to what sort of reality there is corresponding to our thoughts about God. There is something deceptive, even dangerous, about this model. When we reach the limits of human understanding, the glass in which we see darkly puts a question mark over all of our attempts at conceptual clarity. Nevertheless, I feel at this point a greater affinity to

Augustine who said that we must speak, even while recognizing that we are in the area of mystery, than I do to Wittgenstein who urges us not to speak of that whereof nothing can be said.

Briefly put, the minimal model of transcendence can be formulated as follows: the transcendent is the collection of all situationally transcendent resources and continually challenging ideals we experience. The situationally superior resources can be called the *real aspect*, the challenging ideals the *ideal aspect* of the transcendent. This definition of transcendence is an attempt to state in the theoretical language of inquiry the meaning of what in the language of devotion we call "God."

There are five themes at work in the construction of this model.

1. This is a *minimal model*. Part of the problem with the maximal models of transcendence is that they assert too much. Their claims are too extravagant. For example, Anselm thought of God as "that than which nothing greater can be conceived." Aquinas conceived of God as *actus purus*. Tillich spoke of God as being-itself, the ground and abyss of being. All of these claims are extravagant in the sense of asserting a radical ontological distinction between God and all other beings. All of these are forms of maximal theism in that the difference in type of being between God and all other beings makes God to have the maximum of being and value and other things to have less. Often an attempt will be made by these maximal theists to use language which affirms this distinction in being and worth without bringing God into a comparative relationship with beings and processes. Thus Tillich will assert that God is not a being, even the highest being. Nevertheless, maximal theism wishes to claim that there is a radical difference between God's being and value and that of everything else and that this difference amounts to God's superiority in a crucial sense in being and value to everything else. Such maximal claims are too extravagant in content and, often, in modality. However, if we define "God" or "the Divine" in a minimal sense, trying not to assert more than we legitimately can, we will gain in certainty. The less extravagant our claims about the transcendent, the more responsible our affirmations can be. The less we assert the more supportable our affirmations become. Thus the definition of God or the Divine is crucial and logically prior to making assertions about God. Therefore, in this presentation of minimalist religious naturalism we shall construct the minimal model of transcendence as an equivalent to a theoretical definition of God or the Divine.

From this minimalist theme four other themes follow. Each represents a minimalist alternative to a claim made by many maximal models of transcendence.

2. A *separation* is made between the *real* and *ideal* aspects of *transcendence*, between real creative processes within the world which are experienced as situationally superior transcendence and continuing challenging ideals. Most maximal models of transcendence affirm the unity of the real and the ideal aspects of the transcendent. However, from the minimalist perspective this unity is a claim which we do not have adequate ground for affirming. While I cannot definitively assert either the separation or the unity of the real and the ideal aspects, practically, to claim as I do that we do not have sufficient basis to affirm the unity results in a tentative and heuristic affirmation of the separation. The burden of proof, it seems to me, rests with the assertion of the unity.

Often religious naturalists assert one or the other side of this separation. One of the advantages of conceiving of the transcendent by means of the minimal model which we are proposing is that there is a clear assertion of both types of transcendence.

3. Since the unity of the transcendent cannot be affirmed, the minimalist approach remains with an affirmation of the *plurality* of the transcendent. In distinction from the affirmation of the unity of God, this minimalist model does not go beyond affirming the plurality of situationally transcendent resources and the plurality of continually challenging ideals.

4. This model also asserts this-worldly transcendence or *transcendence without ultimacy*. The model does affirm that there are real creative processes transcendent in a significant sense to our ordinary experience and that there are ideals which we may call transcendent. However, it follows from the minimalist intent of this model that it does not assert the ultimate efficacy of these processes nor the ultimate attainment of these ideals in the way which monotheistic believers normally affirm the ultimate efficacy of God's creative and redemptive process and the eschatological attainment of God's purpose.

5. As a corollary to these points, this model does *not affirm an intelligent purposiveness* to a transcendent Creator or Ruler, since presumably purposiveness presupposes a unity of individuality capable of entertaining such a purpose. As the theme of plurality indicates, such an affirmation of unity is not made by this model.

Each of these minimalist themes has an agnostic boundary. This model asserts that the transcendent is composed of at least the

following characteristics which our experience reveals: real transcendent resources and continually challenging ideals. The transcendent in reality may have more than what our experience shows. There may be unity, ultimacy and intelligent purposiveness. However, there is not enough support for these affirmations for us to make them as publicly responsible assertions nor to take them as the basis for a personal faith. Hence our model makes the minimal assertion of a plurality of situationally transcendent resources and continually challenging ideals without ultimacy or intelligent purposiveness.

Conceived minimally, the transcendent has a real and an ideal part. These parts are the analogues in our minimal model of the polarities of blessing and challenge in the triadic schema of the religious experience which we discuss in the next section. There we hope to show that the three elements of our model: transcendence, the real, and the ideal, correspond to the three elements of religious experience: transcendence, blessing, and challenge. Thus our model will be a philosophical reconception of the object of religious experience. Furthermore, real and ideal transcendence will involve secular as well as traditionally religious life.

The Real Aspect of the Transcendent. The real part of the transcendent, defined minimally, is the *collection* of all situationally transcendent resources, that is, the *unexpected and uncontrolled* processes in the universe *in so far as* they are productive of good. These processes can be called "situationally transcendent resources." They are not totally transcendent but, as unexpected and unmanageable, they are relatively transcendent, that is, they are "situationally transcendent," or "situationally superior."

An example of a transcendent resource is the occurrence of unexpected healing. When the resources of a situation as perceived fail to heal the person but an unexpected healing agent enters the picture, then that agent is comparatively transcendent to that situation, provided that it is unexpected, unmanipulable, and superior in power and worth to the resources of the perceived situation. Traditional religious terms for such a transcendent resource are "miracle" and "the healing power of God." According to this model, however, the comparative or situational transcendent is the doctor, drug, healing power of the body or some interaction of these factors, provided that they are transcendent to the situation as perceived.

This paradigm illustrates the fact that situational superiority or transcendence is relative to a personal or temporal point of view. What is unexpected or uncontrollable for the patient may not be so

for the doctor, and what is unexpected before the healing may become expected in a similar situation.

1. Defined minimally, the real aspect of the transcendent is a set or *collection*. It may have a greater degree of cohesiveness, enough to be called a unity or a unified system, but we don't have enough evidence to assert that. There is some degree of unity, of course, because the universe hangs together somewhat. Also this collection does have the common property of being productive of good. However, we cannot affirm that this collection has any more unity than that of a collection. The "real aspect of the transcendent" is a collective term used in the singular for the diverse creatively transcendent realities of the world considered together. It is a collective term in the sense that "wood" is singular collective term for diverse instances of wood. It is the sum of the forces of the world which are productive of good.

2. These processes are *superior* or *transcendent* insofar as they are unexpected and uncontrolled in relation to a perceived situation. This is the meaning of real transcendence within this minimalist perspective. Forces creative of good which are beyond our situation as perceived can enter the situation unexpectedly and hence are transcendent to the situation as perceived from within. Likewise, forces can be uncontrolled and unmanipulable. Such unexpected and uncontrollable processes are situationally transcendent.

Does this mean that such processes should not be studied empirically or that the attempt to control them should not be attempted? No, but insofar as such explanation and control succeeds these processes lose transcendence. They are no longer situationally transcendent. Does this mean that there is an overall process of gradual loss of transcendence? Probably not. Human understanding and control are inevitably limited and it is likely that there will frequently be situationally transcendent resources beyond our grasp. Since perception, understanding and technique never extend to the total system of all processes, the possibility of situationally transcendent resources is always present. This also means that we can combine the pursuit of scientific inquiry and technological movement with the attitudes of expectancy and receptivity to transcendent resources. Hope and openness are compatible with science and technology, although this does mean that the pursuit of truth is not the highest good and that the arrogance of manipulation in human and ecological affairs needs to be tempered. Science and technology need to be yoked with an attitude of openness to the real transcendent.

3. Many of the situationally transcendent processes which are creative in some amounts or situations may be destructive in other amounts or situations. Since we are seeking something analogous to the religious experience of transcendent benefit, we shall call the sum of these forces the real transcendent *only insofar as* they are creative of good.

Most situationally transcendent processes are ambiguous in worth. The "real aspect of the transcendent" is a collective substantive term with the function of an adjective, referring only to the worthy and valuable aspects of these resources.

To clarify the meaning of this model, let us show its application to two examples which are not normally considered part of the transcendent. First, are chemicals such as oxygen or glucose part of the transcendent? The definition is clear. Any chemical is part of the transcendent, in so far as it is situationally transcendent, that is, unexpected and uncontrolled, and also in so far as it is creative or supportive of good. In so far as these chemicals are understood scientifically or by pragmatic common sense they are not part of the transcendent. To the extent that they are controllable by technique they are not part of the transcendent. Further, whenever they are present in such amount or combination as to be harmful or destructive, they are not part of the transcendent. But when at birth or any other struggle for life their presence comes, hoped for perhaps, but beyond our control, they are transcendent resources. Within the minimal perspective, which is akin to naturalism, we do not say that the air and food are bearers of grace, but are gracious themselves. They are not signs of the divine but are part of whatever there is of the divine that we can know. In more poetic language, they are not signs or gifts from God, they are part of the real and visible presence of God.

To move to our second example of clarification, are we humans part of the real aspect of the transcendent? Yes, but again, only in so far as we are situationally transcendent resources, in so far as our graciousness is unmanipulated and is creative of good. Both of these examples seem analogous to what the monotheistic traditions deem idolatry, since the transcendent is our minimal analogue to God. However, we are not saying that either chemicals or people as such are part of the transcendent, but only in so far as they are both situationally transcendent and creative of good. The simple phrase "insofar as" is both the protection against the fanaticism which is analogous to idolatry and a harsh principle of criticism against the destructiveness of chemicals, people, and all other processes and forces of the world.

4. The situationally transcendent processes can give us security by keeping us in established ways, but they are also *potentially revolutionary* in relation to our established ways. They create, support and sometimes radically transform. This is the real aspect of the minimalist analogue to the frequently conservative but potentially radical nature of religion, so that the same religions which can support colonialism or a caste system also can produce such revolutionary figures as Martin Luther King or Mahatma Gandhi.

5. The real aspect of the transcendent calls for an attitude of *openness*, of willingness to grow and even, perhaps, be radically changed. This means that we should be open to resources of growth and transformation even when they are least expected.

The Ideal Aspect of the Transcendent. The ideal part of the transcendent, defined minimally, is the *set* of all continually challenging ideals *insofar as* they are worthy of pursuit. These ideals can be called "continually challenging ideals."

Let us take the pursuit of truth as a paradigm of the ideal aspect of the transcendent. No matter what level of understanding is achieved, truth continues to function as a goal in relation to which our theories are but approximations. The truth is an ideal, never fully attained, which functions as a continual demand that we push toward that goal. It calls for further disciplining of inquiry, refinement of concepts and deeper understanding. Thus truth functions as a continually challenging lure or demand.

1. Defined minimally, the ideal aspect of the transcendent is a *set* or *collection* of ideals. It may have a greater degree of cohesiveness, enough to be called a single goal or ultimate end, but we don't have enough experience or conceptual clarity to assert that. This set may not be capable of full mutual realization. Maximal realization of comfort and adventure, of liberty and security, full actualization of a person's potentials is probably impossible, given the inherent limitations of resources and the demands of survival and community needs. The "ideal aspect of the transcendent" is a collective term used in the singular for the diverse axiologically transcendent goals considered as a set.

2. These ideals are *transcendent* insofar as they continually challenge us to new attainment beyond our present level. This is the meaning of the ideal aspect of transcendence within this minimalist perspective and why they are called continuing ideals. Some ideals are not transcendent. They keep us in our routine or allow us to rest in self-complacency. However, when ideals challenge us, when they lure us to new attainment, forcing us to grow, we may speak of them

as part of the ideal aspect of transcendence. Thus any value which transcends in worth and claim any attempt to attain it is a part of the ideal aspect of the transcendent. In other words, a value or standard is an instance of ideal transcendence if it continues to call no matter what is achieved in pursuit of it.

3. Many ideals may be held in a destructive fashion. They become destructive whenever they are held fanatically, arrogantly or self-righteously. Generally speaking then, ideals are ambiguous. Since we are seeking something analogous to the religious experience of transcendent challenge, we shall call the sum of these ideals the Ideal Transcendent *only insofar as* they are held in a creative fashion. Since many of our ideals are ambiguous in this sense, our judgment of creativity and destructiveness will often be ambivalent.

4. Ideals can make us complacent or self-satisfied. On the other hand, continuing ideals are *revolutionary* in the relation to our established ways. They continually lure us to new levels, creating dissatisfaction with present levels of attainment and often promoting a sense of the worth of the pursuit. This is the ideal aspect of the minimalist analogue to the prophetic protest, to the potentially radical nature of religion.

5. The ideal aspect of the transcendent calls for an attitude of *openness*, of willingness to grow and even be radically changed, if necessary.

To summarize, the minimal model of the transcendent makes the following assertion: *the transcendent is the collection of situationally transcendent resources and continually challenging ideals in the universe*. In short, the transcendent is *the sum of the worthy and constructively challenging aspects of the world*. The central assertion of the minimalist approach to the philosophy of religion is that *the Divine (or God) is at least such as the minimal model asserts*. The Divine may be more than this, but it cannot be affirmed on a minimalist basis.

The distinction between openness to situationally transcendent resources and openness to continuing challenge finds a distinct parallel in Santayana's distinction between piety and spirituality. For Santayana piety is

man's reverent attachment to the sources of his being and the steadying of his life by that attachment. . . .

On the other hand, spirituality involves aspiration.

A direction and an ideal have to be imposed . . . Religion has a second and a higher side, which looks to the end toward which we move as piety looks to the conditions and to the sources of life. This aspiring side of religion may be called Spirituality. . . . A man is spiritual when he lives in the presence of the ideal.¹

An important parallel is that both piety and the minimal model's openness to transcendent resources refer to operative realities. The differences between Santayana's distinction and the minimalist model's distinction between openness to resource and openness to challenge is important, however. A major difference is that piety, in Santayana's conception, is retrospective, while the attitude of openness which we advocate is prospective. It is an awaiting, an expectation of resources of healing, of transformation. Further, these are not just any resources, but situationally transcendent resources. Without this note of transcendence, the key element in religion is lost.

This model is an attempt to articulate a concept of "this-worldly transcendence." It is an attempt to articulate what Bernard Loomer called "the transcendent qualities of the immanent relationships of this world."²

Is the transcendent the same as "God?" This is not a simple question to answer. It seems as if the question calls for a "yes" or "no" answer. But often such questions are inappropriate. Such questions may need to be revised to allow for a third answer. This one is such a question.

On the one hand this is a long, long way from most traditional (and revised) beliefs about God. On the other hand, the transcendent can function in a person's life much like the traditional God. It is real resource for living and a continual challenge for growth. This, I take it, is what the traditional notion of God does in a person's life.

My answer to this question is that whether or not one chooses to call the transcendent (as defined minimally) by the traditional name of God is a matter of personal choice and context. It is close enough to the traditional concept that one can extend the concept of God to cover the minimal transcendent.

The semantic decision made here is that the traditional term "God" can, whenever it is appropriate, be used to refer to the transcendent. When so used, the word "God" will be a complex term designating the collection of both transcendent real resources and the lures of continually transcendent values, imaginatively entertained in a unified fashion as an ontological and religious ultimate.

By "collection" I mean a set with a minimal degree of generic similarity, that is, the similarity of being situationally transcendent constructive forces or continually challenging values. To what extent the collection is merely a linguistic and imaginative convenience or convention we may never be able to decipher. However, the minimalist vision does not go as far as the maximalist tradition of Western monotheism in affirming a decisive ontological unity to this collection.

At this point I find myself in sympathy with Bernard Loomer's answer to this semantic issue. Having identified God as the "concrete, interconnected totality" of the world as a whole, of "this struggling, imperfect, unfinished, and evolving societal web," Loomer raises the question: "Why deify this interconnected web of existence by calling it 'God'? Why not simply refer to the world and to the processes of life?" Especially since on this view "God is not an enduring concrete individual with a sustained subjective life, what is gained by this perhaps confusing, semantic identification?"³

Loomer's identification of God with the interconnected, growing web of the world as a whole is a rather different view than the minimal model proposed here. However, his justification for using the term God is worth listening to.

In our traditions the term 'God' is the symbol of ultimate values and meanings in all their dimensions. It connotes an absolute claim on our loyalty. It bespeaks a primacy of trust, and a priority within the ordering of our commitments. It points the direction of a greatness of fulfillment. It signifies a richness of resources for the living of life at its depths.⁴

My own approach to a functional justification for using religious language for plurality of situationally transcendent powers and norms differs in detail from Loomer. I tend to rely on a phenomenology of the transcendent, eliciting a triadic structure of transcendent blessing and judgment. But Loomer is fundamentally correct: "In our traditions the term 'God' is the symbol of ultimate values and meanings in all their dimensions."

In the language used here, the sum of the worthy and creatively challenging aspects of the world elicits a primacy of trust and a priority in our commitments. Thus it is appropriate to refer to the sum of these aspects as "God." However, since the real aspect of the transcendent is the sum of forces only in so far as they are creative of good and since there is no guarantee that the situationally

transcendent resources will heal and rescue, this trust may not be required. But this ambiguity and lack of guarantee is a continual possibility for the religious life anyway. I have been stimulated in my pluralistic understanding of the Divine by Harley Chapman's study of Jung. However, Jung has a sense of the divine ambiguity. For the minimal model while life is ambiguous, the divine is not.⁵

Many people tend to think in traditional religious symbols. Further, these traditional symbols are helpful in eliciting appropriate attitudes of openness and dedication and also in thinking conceptually of the objects of these attitudes. The term "God" has power.⁶ By reason of its cultural and personal associations it (and its equivalents in other languages) has power to support and challenge as probably no other word in the Western languages. By showing the connection, however remote, between the terms "the transcendent," minimally understood, and "God," some of this power might be picked up by the term "the transcendent." This is a calculated risk.

It is a risk because the passion and familiarity of the traditional term can put an end to thinking, can lead to obscurantism, even fanaticism. On the other hand the term can repel people. It can lead to a fanatical and unthinking rejection of any viewpoint which uses the term.

In short, the proposal here is not that the transcendent is God. Rather, the proposal is that "the transcendent" and "God," minimally understood, share the same reference to transcendent resources and challenges. One term is more useful as an aid to careful reflection. The other term has more power which, like all power, is a two-edged sword. One term is in the language of inquiry, the other in the language of devotion.

If the reader finds the traditional term helpful, then she is encouraged to use it, but with the continual effort to keep the minimal meaning in mind. If the reader finds it a hindrance, then she should drop it. In any case, we should turn our attention to the concrete resources for growth and healing and to the relevant demands which can be discerned in our lives, to the experiences of the realities and challenges which constitute the real and ideal transcendent. That is where our attention should be focussed and is what this philosophy of openness seeks to further. We should use, carefully, whatever linguistic resources we have to thematize, celebrate, and nurture these experiences of this-worldly transcendence.

The key question, however, is not whether a person uses language about God. The key question is whether a person is open to transcendent resources and demands. Indeed, when properly understood, the first question resolves into the second. When the term

“God” is adequately understood, it will be found to refer to inner-worldly transcendent resources and demands.

II. The Triadic Structure of the Experience of the Transcendent

Even though the approach taken in this book renounces the full ontological affirmation of the transcendent which is normally contained in such religious notions as God or Brahman, the major religious traditions provide a clue to the notion of the transcendent which will be useful in our inquiry. This clue is found in the triadic structure of the experience of the transcendent as symbolized in these traditions. When this structure is abstracted and articulated, we are provided with a schema to help us explore our experience for clues to the minimal transcendent and also with the framework which helped us to construct our model of transcendence. In articulating this structure to use as a heuristic device, we will be bracketing for a moment the question as to whether there is any reality to which this concept refers and, if so, the nature of that reality.

1. The Triadic Schema

The apex of the triad is the sense of the otherness of the transcendent. The two base angles are formed by the polarity between the sense of blessing or salvific transformation on the one hand and the call to obedience or divine judgment on the other. In short the triadic schema is formed by the polar experience of blessing-renewal and demand-judgment and by the transcendent source of this experience forming the apex of the triad.

Following this schema we may say that the traditional monotheistic religious experience of the phenomena symbolized as “God” is an apprehension of a transcendent value-source. By “value-source” I indicate the source of meaning or value for a person or social group. (I do not mean to make a bifurcation between being and value, for a source gives being to value by way of creation.) By “transcendent” I mean that which is greater in power and worth, being and value, than things or events in the world as normally experienced by the person or group. There may be other value-sources in the world, such as food, sex, friendship, art, sleep, and so forth, but the transcendent value-source transcends these value-sources in power and worth.

The term “value-sources” has a dual implication. A value can either be factual or ideal as a goal. The transcendent value-source is

thus both the transcendent fulfilment giving value to the person or group and the transcendent demand requiring value.

The polarity of the triadic schema is this sense of fulfilment and demand and the apex is the transcendent aspect of this polarity. As H. Richard Niebuhr has put it, the transcendent value-source is the object of both trust and loyalty.⁷ As fulfilment it gives life and meaning. The fulfilment may be remembered as in the creation myths, be apprehended as present as in ecstasy or the presence of the Spirit, or be anticipated as in apocalypticism or nationalistic Messianism. The demand may be for performance of rite, the following of statutes, a return to God, a new heart, true worship, love of fellow man.

Normally the value-source is received as both fulfilment and demand. In Christian terms God gives both Law and Gospel. Conceivably there might be an apprehension of a value-source which involved only fulfilment or demand (a cosmic Santa Claus or god of wrath divested of mercy), but in view of the general presence of this dual reference, we can say that there is a triadic structure to religious experience: the element of transcendence plus the polarity of support and demand, of succor and obligation.

2. Illustration of the Schema

This triadic schema can be illustrated in a number of ways from the major religious traditions. If the schema is adequate it can be shown to cover major types of expression of the experience of the transcendent. A brief sketch of such a demonstration of adequacy could cover the following items.

The element of transcendence is included, as just indicated, in the experiences of the phenomena symbolized by the concept of God. The polarity of gift and obligation also runs through the major types of expression of these experiences. In the covenant-faith of early Israel it is the polarity of God's election and covenant love (*chen* and *chesed*) and the demand that Israel be faithful. In the priestly tradition it is the polarity between the observances and the temple as expressions of God's presence and as demands for observance and purity. In the prophetic tradition it is the polarity between God's deliverance and the call to return. In the rabbinical tradition it is the polarity between *Torah* as the sign of God's favour and as the demand of obedience. In the apocalyptic tradition it is the polarity between the final triumph of God's eschatological deliverer and the call to persevere to the end. In Jesus' parables it is the polarity

between the coming of the Kingdom and the call to enter it, between God's mercy and the call to be merciful. In Paul and the later history of the Christian tradition it is the polarity between Law and Gospel, or between grace and good works. In Islam Allah is both the All-Merciful and the Judge who calls for belief and obedience.

This same triadic structure is present in the phenomena thematized by the other main religious symbols of the monotheistic traditions. The "soul" is the locus within the self where transcendent demand and succor are apprehended and responded to. "Creation" is a transcendent act of the giving of being, so that it primarily refers to the pole of gift. However, the Creator is the Lord, and creation bestows an obligation to the Creator. "Life after death" refers to a transcendent mode of existence on the other end of the time line. The polarity is present there in the dualism between heaven and hell, although hell represents not obligation so much as the mode of being for those who do not fulfil the obligation or reject the offer of succor. Finally the Torah, Christ, and the Qu'rān exhibit the same structure. They come from God, that is, are transcendent. Also, while they primarily are gifts, they contain the demand to remain faithful to their demands.

This triadic schema is also exemplified in the Hindu and Buddhist traditions. Both traditions are concerned with a transformation of the empirical self. Such a transformation exhibits the polarity of challenge and blessing. Even if the transformation is through "self-power" or self-discovery, its disclosure is salvific. Furthermore, the state of liberation or enlightenment is transcendent to the present state. In the Vedānta of Shankara, Brahman is the transcendent reality. The recognition of the identity of one's true self with Brahman is salvific, while the contrast between this identity and our present misery constitutes a challenge to move towards recognition.

3. Other Scholars

Among researchers who come closest to my triadic structure are Otto, H. H. Farmer and H. Richard Niebuhr. In Rudolf Otto the apex of this triad appears as the *mysterium* while the polarity of demand and blessing appears as the experiential polarity of the *tremendum* and *fascinans*. Herbert Farmer spoke of the polarity with the terms of "claim and succor" and indicated the transcendent apex as "absolute claim and final succor." Similarly Niebuhr described this schema as radical trust and loyalty.⁸

A more extended comparison with William James' articulation of the structure of religion is in order. In *The Varieties of Religious Experience* James asserts that there are three common beliefs to man's religious life: 1) "that the visible world is part of a more spiritual universe from which it draws its chief significance," 2) "that union or harmonious relation with that higher universe is our true end," and 3) "that prayer or inner communion with the spirit thereof—be that spirit 'God' or 'law'—is a process wherein work is really done, and spiritual energy flows in and produces effects, psychological or material, within the phenomenal world." Furthermore religion includes the following psychological characteristics: 4) "a new zest which . . . takes the form either of lyrical enchantment or of appeal to earnestness and heroism" and 5) "an assurance of safety and a temper of peace, and in relation to others, a preponderance of loving affection."⁹

This five-part common structure of religion is congruent with the triadic schema we have articulated. The "more spiritual universe" (1) is roughly equivalent to the transcendent apex of the triad. The effects produced by communion with this world (3) and the psychological characteristics (4 and 5) correspond to the salvific pole of the schema, while the relation to the higher universe which is our true end represents the challenge pole.

It is not always clear in dealing with James as to whether we are dealing with religious experience or the expressions of experience in myth, scripture, ritual or other forms. If we are looking for a common structure of religion our data will be these expressions of religion and it will help if we remember this.

Furthermore James comes to the common characteristics a bit too easily. This is most obvious in his assertion that the conduct of a Christian, a Stoic, and a Buddhist saint are essentially the same.¹⁰ I suggest that, while there are some generic resemblances, they are not identical, however similar they may look to a distant perspective that has just been contemplating libertines or conquerors. In short, the common structure of religion will be generic in character.

A number of scholars have come up with a scheme with a soteriological emphasis. For example, John E. Smith articulates a three-fold structure common to all religions: an Ideal, a Need and a Deliverer. This is somewhat analogous to the three central ideas of Christianity delineated by Josiah Royce: "The Spiritual Community in union with which man is to win salvation," "the hopeless and guilty burden of the individual when unaided by divine grace," and

"Atonement." William James, in *A Pluralistic Universe*, has a similar scheme. Here he analyzes specific religious experiences which he feels are particularly helpful clues to the nature of the universe. Taking Luther (and perhaps Paul) as a paradigm, James refers to feelings of renewal and transformation from experiences of failure and despair to a new range of life. These feelings refer to a transcendent factor which James calls an experience of continuity with a wider spiritual environment.¹¹

Another soteriological approach is made in T. Patrick Burke's thoughtful *The Fragile Universe*. Burke finds five elements in all religions: 1) a sense of the unsatisfactoriness of ordinary experience, 2) a contrasting ideal, 3) a path from the former to the latter, 4) a hidden reality making salvation possible, and 5) the disclosure of this reality. In terms of our schema, the first three represent demand, the fourth is the apex, and the fifth (and the third in one aspect) is blessing. Perhaps the most concise of these soteriological views is that of Frederick Streng: "Religion is a means of ultimate transformation."¹²

There is some question as to whether the soteriological views have captured the common structure of religion. For example, does the scrupulous conscience of the legalist fall under it? In any event the soteriological approaches fall under the triadic schema which we have articulated. Taking Streng's view that "religion is a means of ultimate transformation" as typical of the soteriological views, we find that the element of ultimacy parallels the transcendent apex of our triad. At the same time the process of transformation constitutes both the pole of blessing and at the same time a demand to be transformed.

4. Methodological Comments

The triadic schema is an empirical generalization, as is any similar articulation of a structure found in a field of data. As such, it is hypothetical and vulnerable. Its empirical fit is testable by: 1) its exemplification in the major types of religion, 2) its congruence with other generally recognized statements by competent scholars, and 3) recognition by competent researchers in the field. I have attempted a sketch of a demonstration of the first two of these means of testing. Furthermore, it is corrigible in the light of criticism and of fuller explication of the data.

An interesting methodological problem is whether we start with a delimited field, such as religion (or art or disease or whatever) and then perceive and articulate the structure of the field or

whether we articulate a structure based on a few paradigms and then delimit the field by means of the extent of the instantiation of this structure. This is, of course, similar to the problem of definition in logic or semantics.

I suspect that what happens is that there is a reciprocal determination of structure by a field and of field by structure as the process of inquiry unfolds. An approach which naively follows Aristotelian assumptions (unlike Aristotle himself) tends to assume that fields of inquiry are clearly articulated. Wittgenstein's challenge to conceptual clarity with his discussion of family resemblance is surely a needed corrective to the former approach. But if the former approach can suffer from premature closure, a refusal to delimit a field can likewise result in never attempting closure. Talk of family resemblances may result in giving up the search for the common structure by declaring too soon that it has none.

Given the methodological stance of the reciprocal determination of field and structure, attention needs to be spent on the main boundary disputes. In terms of the present inquiry, do Theravāda Buddhism, the Way of Confucius, and such secular analogues of religion as Marxist-Leninism or Maoism qualify as religions? Such cases as Theravāda and Confucius need not detain us. The fine points of scholarship and interpretation are matters of controversy. Clearly the polarity of demand and benefit is present in both. As to whether transcendence can be said to be genuinely present in these cases depends in part on how transcendence is defined.

The secular analogues to religion, what Tillich called "quasi-religions," are a different matter. In general we can define a religion as a cultural system with an explicit reference to a transcendent direction, while the quasi-religions do not make such explicit reference.

Our triadic structure is not the only structure that could be articulated from the field of religion. The schemas of William James, John E. Smith, T. P. Burke and Frederick Streng are examples of alternative schemas. My claim here is not that my schema is superior to the others, but rather that it is as adequate to the facts as the alternative structures. The reason why I employ it is that it provided the foundation for the minimal model and thus is basic to the rest of this philosophical approach to religion. Any structure will be articulated in reference to the data of the field and in view of the function of the schema in furthering inquiry. (Smith is quite clear about the function of his schema in understanding religious phenomena.) In other words, purpose helps shape (but does not dictate)

the articulation of the structure. Therefore, a schema is to be tested not only for clarity and empirical fit but also for its pragmatic adequacy in further inquiry.

The triadic schema was shaped to provide: 1) a framework to help us construct our minimal model of transcendence, 2) a direction for exploring our experience for clues to transcendence, and 3) a foundation for the criticism and renewal of secular life, both cultural/social and personal.

We have now completed our minimal model of transcendence and its basis in the structure of the experience of transcendence in religion. The problem before us now is to provide a case for the minimal model.

III. A Case for the Model

A rigorous proof for the adequacy of this or any model of transcendence cannot be given. Nevertheless, a case for it can be made, even though the argument will not be conclusive. In the end we will be left with a wager, but it will be a reasoned and weighted wager with a presumption that one side is more likely to be true.

This model is the outgrowth of an ontological commitment in regard to the reality of God considered as an ontological ultimate, a stance of ontological modesty. This ontological stance must be argued for the same as any ontological position must be argued for, that is, on the grounds that it seems, at least to the writer, to be the most adequate of available outlooks.

Ontological reasonings do not rest on a simple empirical basis, although empirical evidence may have some relevance to them. The type of empirical epistemology which rejects ontological reasoning as non-empirical seems to beg the question. On the other hand, our position of ontological restraint is itself an ontological position and cannot be simply argued for on the basis of empiricism without some attempt at justification.

An ontological position cannot be proved, but it can be argued for. It cannot be proved, for one thing, because it is a fundamental position in terms of which criteria of proof themselves are based. But a case for an ontological position can be made, although such an argument will be controversial and not conclusive. Chapman and Robert Neville, for example, are vigorous contemporary defenders of an ontologically supreme ultimate.¹³

1. The Negative Argument

One important, albeit negative, argument for the position of ontological restraint is that none of the major arguments for the reality of God considered maximally as an ontological ultimate make their case. While the following list does not exhaust all possible justification procedures, it probably covers the major types. A full refutation of these arguments is not possible here. However, a sketch of the weaknesses of these arguments will help indicate the objections which can be raised against them.

1) Empirical justification will not work. Although I do advocate a type of radical empiricism in religion, as I discuss in chapter four, the outcome is minimal. It is not pursued to a God or other ontologically supreme reality. D. C. Macintosh and H. N. Wieman may be taken as representatives of this approach. Macintosh starts by defining God as the Object of religious dependence and the Source of salvation. However, he extends the character of this Object and Source beyond what experience yields. For example, he defines God's absoluteness as "meaning absolute satisfactoriness as Object of religious dependence, absolute sufficiency for man's religious needs."¹⁴

Wieman also goes beyond an empirical justification. As he puts it, the creative good is the absolute good, that is, "what is good under all conditions and circumstances." Further, the creative event is "a single, total event continuously recurrent in human existence." A careful analysis would show that the singularity of this event is also not capable of empirical justification.¹⁵ (See below in chapter four.)

2) The history of ontological argumentation for the reality of God considered maximally also offers slim hope for a firm basis for justification. Three common types of reasoning for God as an ontological ultimate are the ontological, the cosmological, and the argument that God is the necessary presupposition of an inescapable human endeavor. I shall indicate difficulties in examples from each type.

Hartshorne's Modal Arguments are typical of the ontological arguments. The core of the weakness of these arguments lies in the ambiguity of the meaning of "necessity." Hartshorne argues correctly that the modal arguments assume that the existence of a perfect being is in the mode of necessity, not contingency. However, logical or modal necessity is not the same as real necessity. The second weakness is that, even if the modal arguments were valid, they would only give us a necessarily existing being, not the object of