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Creating the World: God's Knowledge as Power[1]

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Abstract: The seventeenth century posed and sharpened the debate between intellectualists and voluntarists as to how God created the world. Was he *first* knowing the nature (including the goodness) of the world-to-be, before willing its existence? Or was he knowing its nature (including its goodness) *in* willing its existence? This paper calls upon a contemporary conception of knowledge—*practicalism*, a kind of pragmatism—that promises to make the latter alternative, the voluntarist one, at least more epistemologically plausible than we might otherwise take it to be.

Keywords: Knowledge; God; best possible world; practicalism; Descartes; Anscombe

1. INTRODUCTION

Leading seventeenth-century European philosophers grappled mightily with a fundamental question at once metaphysical and epistemological:[2]

> With what knowledge, with what intentions, and with what power did God render the world's existence compatible with its

[1] Thanks to Deborah Brown and Stephen Buckle for comments on a draft of this paper.

[2] On this question's centrality within the philosophical debates of the time, see S. Nadler, *The Best of All Possible Worlds: A Story of Philosophers, God, and Evil* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2008).

> including what will appear to many people to be evil actions, say? In particular, how could an all-good, all-knowing, and all-powerful God have created a world that is at least apparently a home for much evil?

That question engendered two main forms of answer at the time. These alternatives remain conceptually alive today.

Malebranche and Leibniz, for example, were *intellectualists* about this issue. Leibniz's answer is still justly famous. It told us that God began this process by knowing the nature of each possible world, from among the infinite array of such worlds; that God thereby knew which was the best possible word (either overall or in every respect); that God, given his infinite goodness, chose to create that particular world;[3] and that God, given his infinite power, acted successfully on that choice. That is, confronted at the outset by those worldly facts, God acted on the knowledge of them that he thereby gained: he acted by creating this world in particular—a sort of action that only he could have performed—on knowledge that only he could have had. In short, the all-good and all-powerful God acted as a rational agent, in response to knowledge, in creating the world. Indeed, he acted in that respect as a *perfectly* rational agent, on the basis of all of the relevant knowledge that there *could* be.

Contrast that sort of account with the divine *voluntarism* advocated by Descartes and Arnauld. Instead of describing God as responding to knowledge that he possessed *before* acting as he did in creating the world, the voluntarist interpretation tells us the following. God chose which world to create or actualise; it was *thereby* the best possible world, precisely by being the product of God's deliberate action; and God knew that this would be so, simply by knowing that he was exercising his will. God thus did not have to know this world's nature, including its goodness, *before* creating it. Moreover, this was not a cognitive limitation upon God, because the world's being the best possible world was constituted only *by*

[3] Or, in more current metaphysical parlance, God chose to *actualise* that world from among the pre-existing possible worlds. I will continue to talk of creation rather than of actualisation.

his creating it, an action performed knowingly—indeed, self-knowingly. Thus, God's knowing this world's nature (including its goodness) *was* in part his acting to create this world. And so his knowing of the world's nature did not precede his willing; he created (through his willing) what he *thereby* knew to be so—namely, this world's being the best possible one. He created that truth *in* knowing that he was creating it.

2. A CONCEPTUAL CHALLENGE

I will focus on that debate's epistemological dimension. Specifically, is there a model of knowledge and knowing that could help us to interpret the voluntarist's interpretation in an epistemologically coherent way? That question is pressing because, at least *prima facie*, the issue is more of a challenge to the voluntarist's interpretation than to the intellectualist's. As I will now explain, the latter has the initial conceptual advantage, at any rate, of being able to call upon an epistemologically familiar general kind of view about knowledge's nature—a general kind of view, however, that is unavailable to the voluntarist.

On Leibniz's intellectualist picture, for instance, God's knowledge of the possible worlds' natures (including which one of them is the best) is thereby a knowing relationship to an independently obtaining truth about the world and its goodness—a truth that can have been constituted, and hence can have obtained, prior to God's scrutinising those worlds and their natures. And that combination of independence and priority is at least a general category of knowing relationship with which epistemologists are familiar from their long-standing efforts to fashion theories of *our* knowing relationships to what *we* know: in knowing that there is a rabbit eating your breakfast, for example, you know a truth that can have obtained independently of, and prior to, your knowing of it. Yet even that comfortingly familiar epistemological picture is spurned by the voluntarists Descartes and Arnauld. And this leaves us with the question of whether we have available *any* epistemological picture—including any that we can understand as pertaining readily to people—that could allow us, by extension, to regard the voluntarist account as coherent in what it says about *God's* knowledge when he was creating this, the best of all possible worlds.

After all, here is Descartes's blunt statement of the voluntarist position:[4]

> In God willing and knowing are a single thing in such a way that *by the very fact of willing something he knows it and it is only for this reason that such a thing is true.*

Three weeks later, in another letter to Mersenne,[5] Descartes reinforced that point:

> In God, willing, understanding and creating are all the same thing without one being prior to the other even *conceptually*.

Yet how *could* that be so? I will not attempt to understand in its philosophical entirety how it might be so. But I will examine one epistemological question raised by the claim from Descartes's story. This is the question of whether we *can* understand knowledge in a way that allows us to accept that God could knowingly have created the best possible world without there being facts, as to which world would be the best possible one, that were known by God prior to that act of creation by him. That is more a question about the nature of knowledge than of God. If we insist that knowledge is always, by its nature, directed at something—in this case, the facts as to the goodness or otherwise of the various possible worlds—with an existence that is prior to, or independent of, the creating of that something, then Descartes's divine voluntarism could well remain beyond the explicative resources of the theories of knowledge that are available to us, at least within contemporary epistemology. *Is* this the plight of the voluntarist approach to conceiving

[4] Letter to Mersenne, 6 May 1630. In A. Kenny (ed. and trans.), *Descartes: Philosophical Letters* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981), 13-14.

[5] Letter to Mersenne, 27 May 1630 (ibid., 15). See also a letter to Mersenne, of 2 May 1644 (ibid., 151):

> nor should we conceive any precedence or priority between [God's] understanding and his will; for the idea which we have of God teaches us that there is in him only a single activity, entirely simple and entirely pure. This is well expressed by the words of St. Augustine: *They are so because you see them to be so*; because in God *seeing and willing* are one and the same thing.

of God's creating the world? Is it an approach lacking in epistemological substance, unable to point to a theory of knowledge's nature that would ground its epistemic claims about God's creating the world?[6]

3. A CONCEPTUAL PROPOSAL

3.1. Knowledge-practicalism

In fact, we *do* have available to us an epistemological proposal with the potential to clarify the epistemic element of section 2's divine voluntarism. The proposal is my *practicalist* conception of knowledge.[7]

[6] Ultimately, the *metaphysics*, not only the epistemology, of Descartes's picture would also need to be supported. Notice that part of the quoted Cartesian approach is replicated in how, more recently, epistemologists have often described analytic truths—as being such that merely *understanding* such a truth is enough for knowing that it is true. Descartes's divine voluntarism, we see, adds to this the idea that, for God, to understand p is also to *want* p to be true and to be able to *make* it true that p—at least for some specific values of 'p'. This seems to imply that God's willing the world into existence would be his knowing the world only *as whatever* is being thus created. As Descartes was urging, this would be a form of absolute power, as befits God. Nonetheless, the concern felt by Leibniz and others was substantive: how could we take from this conception any confidence that God has created a world that is the best, unless 'the best' just *means* (analytically and uninformatively) 'created by God'? In such a circumstance, it seems, we would not have the powerful metaphysical picture that was being promised.

[7] The conception is a *pragmatist* one, in its general outlook. The term 'practicalism' is used because (as I am about to explain) the conception is centred upon a reduction, of knowledge-that to knowledge-how—where knowledge-how is often called *practical* knowledge. See S. Hetherington, *How To Know: A Practicalist Conception of Knowledge* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), "Knowledge and Knowing: Ability and Manifestation," in *Conceptions of Knowledge*, ed. by S. Tolksdorf (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), "Skeptical Challenges and Knowing Actions," *Philosophical Issues* 23 (2013), "Self-Knowledge as an Intellectual and Moral Virtue?" in *Moral and Intellectual Virtues in Western and Chinese Philosophy: The Turn Towards Virtue*, ed. C. Mi, M. Slote, and E. Sosa (New York: Routledge, 2015), "Knowledge as Potential for Action," *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy* 9 (2017). http://journals.openedition.org/ejpap/1070, "Knowledge and Knowledge-Claims: Austin and Beyond," in *Interpreting Austin: Critical Essays*, ed. S.L. Tsohatzidis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), and "The Epistemic Basing Relation, and Knowledge-That as Knowledge-How," in *Well-Founded Belief: New Essays on the Epistemic Basing Relation*, ed. P. Bondy and J.A. Carter (New York: Routledge, forthcoming).

Coincidentally, I offer my knowledge-practicalism as a conceptual contrary to what Gilbert Ryle called intellectualism.[8] The Rylean sense of intellectualism pertains to the nature of *intelligent actions*—riding a bicycle, playing chess, crafting a chair, composing a sonata, etc. Each such action exemplifies some sort of knowledge-how on the part of the agent. And the sort of intellectualism discussed by Ryle accords an intelligent action an *epistemic* nature—in effect, the 'intelligence' within it—only by insisting on the following:[9]

(i) the agent has some associated knowledge-that (e.g. the knowledge that this is what riding a bicycle involves in such a circumstance: …);
(ii) this knowledge-that is accessible to the agent's intellect at the relevant time;[10]
(iii) this knowledge-that is somehow used by the agent in bringing about, or even in guiding into existence, the action in question.

Ryle argued, influentially so, against intellectualism. His conclusion was that knowledge-how and knowledge-that are fundamentally distinct forms of knowledge. He reached that conclusion by arguing (most notably, by describing a putative conceptual regress) that knowledge-that is not always required as part of bringing about a given intelligent action, and hence that knowledge-how is not itself a kind of knowledge-that. The Rylean argument took this form:

[8] See G. Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (London, Hutchinson, 1949) and "Knowing How and Knowing That," in his *Collected Papers,* vol. II (London: Hutchinson, 1971).

[9] For the most developed contemporary versions of intellectualism, see J. Stanley and T. Williamson, "Knowing How," *The Journal of Philosophy* 98 (2001) and J. Stanley, *Know How* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[10] Condition (ii) is recognisable to contemporary epistemologists as an epistemically *internalist* condition. When Ryle was writing on knowledge-that and knowledge-how, epistemologists had not begun to distinguish between epistemic internalism and epistemic externalism. The distinction is still not as clear as it might be. For an influential discussion of it, see W.P. Alston, *Epistemic Justification: Essays in The Theory of Knowledge* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), ch. 8.

> Let KT_A be some knowledge-that, associated with the KH_A (the knowledge-how to perform an action such as *A*). On intellectualism, *A* is performed as an expression or manifestation of KH_A only if KT_A is used appropriately (such as by guiding *A* into existence). But KT_A's being used in that way would, at the very least, be an intelligent action itself: call it *A1*. So, again by intellectualism, there needs to be some KT_{A1}, associated with some KH_{A1}, ... And in principle this pattern persists, without end.

For the sake of argument, let us grant the success of Ryle's form of reasoning, as far as it goes. Even so, his strategy left open the conceptual possibility that prompts my alternative picture. For my practicalism offers a *converse* conceptual reduction, of knowledge-that to knowledge-how. Ryle denied that knowledge-how is always a kind of knowledge-that; he inferred that the two are therefore fundamentally distinct kinds of knowledge; but there is also the practicalist possibility to consider—namely, that knowledge-that is always a kind of knowledge-how.

Here, then, is a brief sketch of knowledge-practicalism.[11]

First, since it conceives of knowledge-that as knowledge-how, the central move being made by practicalism is to let knowledge that p be an *ability*, even a *power*.[12] Most likely, of course, in a given case the knowledge-how will be quite complex. This will amount to its encompassing several or more *sub*-powers. For example, the knowledge that 100+1=101 might, for a given person at a given time, be a complex of powers or abilities along the following lines—an ability to calculate (in different ways) that 100+1=101, and/or an ability to report this when apt, and/or an ability to apply the truth that 100+1=101, and/or an ability to explain that truth (in different ways), and/or etc.

[11] My previous practicalist publications develop it as an account only of people's knowledge. Section 3.2 will examine how it might apply to God's knowledge.

[12] For discussion of whether knowledge-how should in general be thought of as an ability, see P. Snowdon, "Knowing How and Knowing That: A Distinction Reconsidered," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 104 (2013). For counter-argument, see S. Hetherington, *How to Know: A Practicalist Conception of Knowledge* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 46-47.

Second, we can distinguish *knowledge* from *knowing*. Knowledge that p is a state of having knowledge that p; and so it is a complex power or ability. But then we may think of knowing that p on a given occasion as an action—in particular, an action manifesting or exemplifying or expressing that state of knowledge that p. For instance, there is the state—the knowledge-how, the ability or power—that constitutes one's having the knowledge that 100+1=101. And many possible activities would manifest or express that state—calculating and/or reporting and/or applying and/or explaining and/or etc.—with all of these bearing more or less directly upon the truth that 100+1=101.

That distinction between knowledge and knowing matters, in a few ways. For a start, it allows that in principle the state that is some specific knowledge—the associated, and possibly complex, power or ability—could be present at a time for a person, *regardless* of whether that knowledge is being expressed or manifested—in effect, activated—by her at that time. When you are asleep, you continue to possess the knowledge that 100+1=101, even if you are not doing anything that manifests this knowledge: you are not answering relevant questions, not performing related calculations, not actively representing to yourself the fact that 100+1=101, etc. Knowledge-practicalism suggests that we may parse this state of affairs as your retaining, while asleep, the knowledge that 100+1=101, even as you are not actively *knowing*—in the sense that you are not *activating* the state that is your knowledge—that 100+1=101.

To some, this substantive use of the term 'knowing,' so that it is something *other* than a mere notational variant of 'knowledge,' will sound too odd as a description of action. Maybe my practicalist proposal is to that extent somewhat revisionary. The idea is that we may let 'knowing' be an *umbrella* term. It denotes whatever actions—such as the calculating, and/or the reporting, and/or representing, and/or etc.—that are, as it happens on a particular occasion, manifesting or expressing a given state of knowledge, such as the knowledge that 100+1=101. After all, those actions would be the kinds of action they are—that is, intelligent ones (in Ryle's sense), ones that are expressive *of* the knowledge—only by the knowledge's being an ability or power in the first place, an ability or power to *be* manifested or expressed in such ways. In that way, therefore, *the knowledge-that 100+1=101 would literally be the potential*—because it is the epistemic agent's having the relevant power or ability—for itself to

be expressed or manifested in one or more of those ways by that epistemic agent. More generally, therefore (and for any 'p'), knowledge that p would always *be* this sort of complex potential.

That point will be significant in section 3.2; as will another key to knowledge-practicalism's conceptual utility—a key that emerges from practicalism's engagement with the following view, one that is standard within current epistemology:

> Knowledge is always a kind of *belief*—specifically, a true and epistemically augmented belief. (Much contemporary epistemology then discusses the possible nature of that epistemic augmentation, generating myriad theories of epistemic justification and knowledge.) Those actions—the calculating, the explaining, the answering, etc.—that are highlighted by knowledge-practicalism arise *because of* the belief's presence and its epistemic properties. They are typical *effects* of one's having the knowledge; they are not at all (metaphysically) *constitutive* of one's having the knowledge itself. Only the belief (when suitably epistemically augmented) has the latter status.

Clearly, knowledge-practicalism has a contrary interpretation, as follows, of those same data that are taken by most contemporary epistemologists to reflect knowledge's having a kind of belief:

> On that standard epistemological approach, your having the *belief* that 100+1=101 is treated as more constitutively important to the knowledge that 100+1=101 than are any of those other kinds of action that you do or could perform. But why *must* epistemologists adopt that particular interpretive stance? There is an alternative interpretive stance available to us: belief can itself be thought of as *just one more* of those sub-powers, with there being some range of more or less typical ways of manifesting or expressing it. These 'ways' will *thereby* be manifesting or expressing the knowledge, too—yet without the belief needing to be treated as *being* the knowledge. So, we *add* your believing—or, if we wish, the comparatively specific *ways* of believing—that 100+1=101 to that list of possible actions with which you might express your knowledge that 100+1=101. And, with that move, again we are regarding the knowledge that

> 100+1=101 as *being* the power—the knowledge-how—that underlies at once that array (now understood slightly more expansively, as including actions that amount to believing that 100+1=101).

Note that the potential array of sub-powers and of actions manifesting or expressing these *is* a sequence built around repeated occurrences of 'and/or'. It is also temporally indexed throughout. Even for a single person's persisting knowledge that 100+1=101, not all of the same members of that potential array need be possible for that epistemic agent at each time of having that knowledge. This flexibility even allows knowledge-practicalism to imply—contrary, once more, to epistemological orthodoxy—that the possession of good *evidence* in particular need not always be part of having some piece of knowledge at a given time. Sometimes, perhaps, the evidence arrives later: in a given case, someone's having the knowledge that p might then help them to *find* good evidence for p. I am not saying that this is the usual situation for knowers. But knowledge-practicalism leaves open the conceptual possibility of its obtaining at least sometimes.[13] Using the previous paragraph's terms, we may say that possessing, using, and responding to evidence that 100+1=101 is simply *one* among the many possible ways of manifesting or expressing knowledge that 100+1=101.

So, this is the general idea behind knowledge-practicalism:

> Knowledge even of a specific p is a power—possibly an indeterminately specified power, quite likely a power that encompasses other sub-powers bearing aptly and more specifically upon p. Any or even none of these sub-powers might be manifested or expressed on a given occasion for a given

[13] It is a possibility that was highlighted by Isaac Levi, *The Enterprise of Knowledge: An Essay on Knowledge, Credal Probability, and Chance* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 1980), 1-2, and then argued for—more notoriously—by Crispin Sartwell: "Knowledge Is Merely True Belief," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 28 (1991) and "Why Knowledge Is Merely True Belief," *The Journal of Philosophy 89* (1992). See also S. Hetherington, *Good Knowledge, Bad Knowledge: On Two Dogmas of Epistemology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), "The Redundancy Problem: From Knowledge-Infallibilism to Knowledge-Minimalism," *Synthese* 195 (2018) and Richard Foley, *When Is True Belief Knowledge?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

> epistemic agent who has the knowledge that p, even as her knowledge that p—the more general and encompassing power—remains in place for her.

3.2. Knowledge-practicalism about God's Knowledge

How might section 3.1's practicalist picture of people's knowledge in general be applied to God's knowledge in particular? At the heart of knowledge-practicalism, we saw, is a concept of power; and surely the idea that knowledge *is* nothing beyond a kind of power is, if anything, even more beguiling when the knowledge in question is God's.

On knowledge-practicalism, any case of knowledge that p is a more or less complex clustering of sub-powers, each of which bears aptly upon its being the case that p. I have indicated a few forms that such sub-powers might take, depending on the specific p. They could be powers to represent, and/or to question, and/or to answer, and/or to explain, and/or to calculate, and/or to gather evidence, and/or etc. Now, that 'etc.' might cover many more possibilities. Crucially, though, what of the power to *bring it about* that p? Could this be one of those possibilities? The question is important because (from section 1) we are told by the voluntarist Descartes that God has this power for any value of 'p'. Obviously, we are well aware that, for such beings as ourselves, there are vastly fewer such values. Still, we may allow that, whenever such a power *is* present for a given epistemic agent and for a given 'p', this power could (other things being equal) be one of those sub-powers that are collectively constituting the associated epistemic agent's knowledge that p. After all, if an epistemic agent was to manifest that power in relation to a given p, she would be rendering it true that p.[14] And, just as *reporting* p's being true could be a manifestation or expression of knowledge that p, so could *rendering* p's being true—'rendering', in the sense of *making* it true that p. Again, for people there are very few values of 'p' for which this will ever occur. For God, though, that is not so. On the contrary: any true p, including the truth of this world's being the best possible one, would obtain only because of God's willing it to be so; and my practicalist-

[14] On the related idea of truth as first and foremost a property of actions (and only secondarily of propositions), see R. Campbell, *The Concept of Truth* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

voluntarist suggestion (as we might call it) is that this sort of *willing* p 'into existence' would be a way for God to be *knowing actively* that p obtains.[15] The practicalist-voluntarist could then add that both the willing and the (active) knowing would be manifestations or expressions of God's (already existing state of) knowledge that p. The knowledge that p would, in effect, have been God's power *to* proceed to know in that active way that p, including that active p-*creating* way. In short, God's knowledge that p, for any p, would *be* his power, in part, to make p true by willing its being true. Hence, in particular, God's knowledge that this is the best possible world would have *been* his power to create this world with its various features that collectively constitute its being the best of all possible worlds.

Of course, we must now be careful not to interpret that story in non-practicalist terms; for that would be to misinterpret the story.

First, section 3.1's practicalist picture implies that such knowledge on God's part could be present *even before God acts on it* so as to make the world be as it is. Recall that (for practicalism) an instance of knowledge can—since it is in fact some knowledge-how, an ability, or a power—be *present* even when not being manifested or expressed. And a special instance of this general state of affairs would be the particular knowledge's being present before it is *ever* manifested or expressed by the knower. Consequently, we have the epistemological licence to infer that *this* is how God could have had the knowledge prior to his creating the world: he knew which was the best of all possible worlds, by having the power which was this knowledge; and the power was in part the power to create what would thereby be the best possible world.

Thus (and second), remember practicalism's distinction between knowledge and knowing—that is, between the state of knowledge (which would be some knowledge-how, an ability or power) and any actions manifesting or expressing that knowledge-state. In the terms of that distinction, God's creating the world would be an act of *knowing* on his part—an action that would be *expressing* or *manifesting* the knowledge-how or power that was his knowledge of the world's nature. So, on this paper's practicalist-voluntarist suggestion, God's relevant *knowledge*

[15] Later, God might know actively that p *still* obtains—with his willing that continuation of p's obtaining.

could have preceded his creating the world, but his *knowing* could not have done so. His knowing this world's preeminent nature would itself be an *action* on his part—his action of willing the world's existence or actualisation.

Third, recall how the paper's practicalism accommodates the possibility of some knowledge that p's not needing to include at a given time any *evidence*, say, for p—and hence not needing to include *any* evidence for p before the epistemic agent decides to act in ways that bear aptly upon p's being true. Accordingly, on the paper's practicalist-voluntarist picture, God's knowledge would likewise not need to have included, in advance of his expressing or manifesting the knowledge in acts of creation, any evidence that this would be the best possible world to create. Using evidence would not be essential to God's knowing. Again (at least on the Cartesian story that I am seeking to supplement), God's creating this world *makes* it true that this is the best possible world; and he knows this truth actively, *in* making it be a truth—thereby manifesting or expressing what was already his knowledge of this world's goodness (in the sense of his knowledge-how, his power, to *make* it true that this world is the best).

In a few ways, therefore, applying knowledge-practicalism to this classically significant case should please a Cartesian divine voluntarism. Here, again, is the resulting practicalist-voluntarist picture:

> God's creating the world *reflects* his knowledge of this world's features. But it does this in a metaphysical—not an evidential—way: God's act of creating this world is an *expression* or *manifestation* of his knowledge of this world's nature (including the fact that it would be the best possible world). That knowledge was, in part, God's correlative *power* to create this world, including its therefore being the best possible world. This world as such, including its being the best possible one, is thus a result of an act (of knowing) that was itself an expression or manifestation of the power that was God's pertinent knowledge.

4. ANSCOMBE ON PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE

How else might we try to portray God's knowledge in a voluntarist way? The closest competitor to my knowledge-practicalism is Elizabeth Anscombe's discussion of what she called *practical* knowledge—a

different beast, she claimed, from what she called *contemplative* knowledge (and which most epistemologists would simply call knowledge-that).[16] When using the term 'practical knowledge', Anscombe had in mind knowledge that embodies 'reasoning leading to action', as opposed to knowledge—knowledge-that; contemplative knowledge—that reflects 'reasoning for the truth of a conclusion'.[17] Practical knowledge, in Anscombe's sense, is thus doubly active knowledge: practical reasoning is involved, culminating typically in action beyond the reasoning itself.[18]

However, Anscombe's picture, unlike mine, is at least not immediately applicable to God's knowledge; for although God could reason, presumably he never needs to do so, in the sense in which we typically do have that need. Specifically, God need not reason in order to *ascertain* or *discover* a truth for himself. If so, then Anscombe's view is at best applicable to our practical knowledge and not to God's. Moreover, Sebastian Rödl deems Anscombe's practical knowledge to be a kind of *self*-knowledge.[19] One knows what one intends doing, even as one thereby intends doing it. That is the sort of knowledge that she is discussing. But this focus of hers, if applied to the question about God's creative knowledge, would restore the intellectualist's concern about divine voluntarism. It would be telling us only that God knows *what he is intending* to create. It would not be telling us about the world—the object of creation—as such. In contrast, this paper's practicalist-voluntarist proposal is for (1) God's relevant knowledge to *be*, in effect, the potential for this world to exist (with the best possible world's thereby existing), and for (2) God's associated *active knowing*, his knowingly creating the world, to be the willed expression or manifestation of that potential. Accordingly, God's power, unlike ours, is such that even the world as a whole can be created knowingly, as a manifestation or expression of his knowledge. The latter would be a complex power possessed by God prior

[16] Anscombe, G.E.M. *Intention*, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1963).

[17] Ibid., 60.

[18] It should be acknowledged that Anscombe's account is not especially clear. For some interpretative discussions of it, see A. Ford, J. Hornsby, and F. Stoutland (eds.), *Essays on Anscombe's* Intention (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

[19] S. Rödl, *Self-Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

to his manifesting or expressing it (such as by his bringing us into existence)—a power, nonetheless, that never needed to include God's having and evaluating *evidence* (about this world and its nature) prior to his manifesting or expressing that knowledge (in part by bringing us into existence).

5. CONCLUSION

I hope that there is independent epistemological merit in section 3.1's practicalism about the nature of knowledge in general; for section 3.2 then shows how that generality might apply to God's knowledge in particular. The paper's aim has been to render coherent at least the epistemological dimension of the voluntarist interpretation, offered by Descartes especially, of God's having created, knowingly, the best possible world. This world would be the best (on this paper's interpretation) precisely *because* God created it—and because his doing so was itself an action expressing or manifesting his power to do so, a power that was *also* literally his knowledge that the world, prior to being created, would be thus and so (including being the best possible world). Even so, this knowledge of God's did not—that is, its simply *being* knowledge did not entail its having a—need to include his already having any evidence (let alone his having been reflecting upon his evidence) that the world would be thus and so. Rather, once, and only once, the knowledge (the pertinent power possessed by God) was being manifested or expressed in active knowing by God, these acts of knowing were actively *creating* the world and thereby its being the best possible world.

Obviously, this paper's programmatic epistemological account—the application of my knowledge-practicalism to a divine voluntarism—is not a vindication of *all* aspects of the voluntarist interpretation of God's creating the best possible world. It is not an account, for instance, of how God's *goodness* as such enters the story. Nevertheless, it does provide a way of answering the otherwise perplexing structural question of how God's knowledge and his will could both be manifested at once, in the same actions. God's will is a power that could be part of his knowledge, which is itself a power. Acts of knowing that are expressing or manifesting that knowledge could also be manifesting or expressing that will. This concurrence helps us conceptually. It simplifies the challenges present in defending a Cartesian version of divine voluntarism (if that is our wish),

according to which God's will *is* at least part of his knowledge. Once we conceive of the state of knowledge *as* a complex power—a power able to be expressed in subsequent knowing actions that have themselves been willed—at least one significant conceptual hurdle has been cleared, en route to a coherent Cartesian voluntarism about God's creating the best possible world.

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