<p style="text-align:center">APOCALYPSE **and Our Role in God's Plan**
A Theological Analysis by Hansen Wendlandt, March 16, 2004</p>

After the 20th Century watched humanity first develop the potential to destroy itself, the 21st Century has established its inevitability. Nuclear war remains a possibility today, and other modes of universal destruction may arise; but the newer concern for those who are willing and able to recognize it is the much slower, much more certain environmental degradation. Regardless how long our species can avert other apocalyptic possibilities or how responsible we become in caring for our environment, eventually our planet, or any future source of sustenance, will fail to support life as we know it. Only concerted effort by the world's citizenry will postpone and lessen the complications and suffering associated with the ecological collapse; but the power and responsibility to implement a re-orientation toward sustainability lies in the hands of world leaders, particularly America's.

With the United States' election looming, it is worth noting the candidates' attitudes toward our environmental situation. Their political opinions on individual environmental decisions are ethically important insofar as they affect history. In facing the *end* of history, though, theology stakes a unique claim to the ground and methodology of investigation. A theological investigation of the end of history, driven by an analysis of the environmental situation, raises a basic question about our role in its culmination. Do we have the power to postpone its inevitability? If so, what does that imply about God's sovereignty and God's relationship with the world? In short, what can the environmental policies of a *complex* group of candidates teach us about our place in God's 'plan' for the world?

The Political Situation

The first election polls released after John Kerry became the *de facto* Democratic candidate for President of the United States—hence the world's most potentially influential person on nearly any policy—showed a very close race between him and Republican incumbent George W. Bush. Kerry led by only five percent (51%-46%),[1] although the 3% margin of error effectively means that the candidates are in a dead heat for the popular vote.[2] Winning a majority of the popular vote tends to correlate with victory in America, *unless* of course the popular choice fails to secure the necessary state electoral support. Precisely this civic technicality in our anti-federalist democratic system came to the fore in 2000, when the right-immersed Bush 'beat' the left-leaning Al Gore. Accordingly, the Bush government has led America and powerfully affected the course of world history, environmentally and otherwise, for nearly four years. (Attached

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[1] http://www.gallup.com/poll/focus/sr030701.asp?ci=10021 shows Kerry moving past Bush just as he assumed the Democratic candidacy.
[2] At the completion of this project, the latest polls showed Kerry leading Bush 52%-44%. (www.gallup.com/election2004/)

picture taken from http://www.ksdk.com/news/news_article.aspx?storyid=66684, 1/28/05).

While such an anomaly of politics and mathematics is possible for the close 2004 Bush-Kerry race, popular polls remain of vital importance for determining strategy, building supporters' confidence, and currying the favor of undecided voters. Although they are only imperfect samples of a tiny percentage of voters' opinions, polls are invaluable for making projections. The only other tool for estimating voters' decision-making is analysis of past election data. So, it is noteworthy that the early polls in 2004 share a major characteristic with the 2000 pre-election polls[3] and final data that determined Bush the winner.[4] That "characteristic" is the significance of Ralph Nader's third party candidacy.

Where the far-left Green Party candidate Nader garnered an important 3% of the popular vote in 2000, he is currently respected at 6%.[5] There is no doubt that four years ago his lower share of votes affected the final results. For, while Gore's camp can be blamed alongside the 'Green factor', especially in the key loss of his home state of Tennessee, Gore lost New Hampshire and Florida by margins narrower than the amount of votes Nader carried.[6] The affect was most clearly felt in Florida, where Bush won by less than 1000 votes, with Nader supporters casting over 97,000 votes. Moreover, asked for whom they would have voted if Nader had not been a candidate, over two-thirds of his supporters chose Gore.[7] If either state had gone to Gore, he would have won the presidency. Thus, it is plainly reasonable to claim that Nader *cost* Gore the presidency and contributed to the inauguration of a Bush government with environmental, economic, and international relations attitudes quite different from either loser. (Attached picture taken from http://www.realchange.org/nader.htm, 3/24/04).[8]

The Green factor may be slightly less pronounced in the 2004 election, because Kerry is more of a centrist than Gore, leaving the possibility open that more than one-third of Nader's supporters will be interested in Bush.[9] Yet, to the degree that polls

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[3] On 27 October 2000, CNN/Time reported Bush's lead over Gore to be 49%-43%, with a 3% margin of error. They also noted that the ABC/Washington Post poll had Bush a leader 48%-45%, and Reuters/MSNBC had Bush a leader at 45%-43%.
(http://www.cnn.com/2000/ALLPOLITICS/stories/10/27/cnntime.poll/index.html)

[4] http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2000/results/ shows that Bush lost the popular vote by about 550,000, but collected just more than the necessary electoral votes.

[5] http://www.nytimes.com/2004/03/09/opinion/09COOK.html reveals the latest data for Nader's statistical affect on the election.

[6] http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2000/results/ breaks down the votes cast state for state. Bush won Florida by, approximately, 2,912,000 (49%) to 2,911,000 (49%) votes, with Nader picking up 97,500 (2%), Pat Buchanan 17,500 (0%), and Harry Browne 16,000 (0%). Bush won New Hampshire by, approximately, 273,000 (48%) to 266,000 (47%) votes, with Nader picking up 22,000 (4%), Brown 2,700 (1%), and Buchanan 2,600 (0%).

[7] http://www.nytimes.com/2004/03/09/opinion/09COOK.html explains the exit polls from 2000.

[8] See this site for a most comprehensive critique of Nader's political career.

[9] On the other hand, because the Green Party would receive governmental campaign financing for the next election if they secure 5% of the popular vote, according to American law, Nader's motivation may become more of a factor. That is, he may be in a *better* position than he was in the last election to draw supporters

matter, and they do in the minds of the public and the prognosticators, Nader's candidacy is detrimental to Kerry and a boon to Bush.[10] Democrats lament this fact, not only from a statistical standpoint, but for the despair they feel at a perceived irrationality from Nader supporters. For, third party candidates are not in a position to win a presidential election in the contemporary political scheme in America. Thus, according to Democratic critics, their votes are 'wasted' on *idealism*. It is perceived as "idealism" because their goals are, to be very simplistic, extreme and unrealistic emphases of Democratic goals that point in nearly the same direction. But while the general and achievable goals of a Democratic government are relatively similar to Green hopes, Republican initiatives are very often in strong distinction to the Green agenda. Hence, the despair is that unrealistic extremism has divided the fight against a common enemy.

The telling, relevant example is this: Gore offered America and the world the most environmentally-committed (electable) leader ever, while Bush outwardly supports the more immediate use ("abuse", some would say) of nature for economic ("corporate", some would say) advantage. The latter claims that these initiatives and priorities will help people here and now, who 'deserve' such benefits.

"It's your money. You paid for it."

—George W. Bush[11]

He may be correct for the short term; however, Bush's de-prioritization of environmental concerns is detrimental for humanity in the long term, unless his plan retains some possibility for ecological sustainability. When we consider our genuine environmental situation, it will be clear that this is a hopeless chimera. So, even if Bush can carry us in a cloud (Rev 11:12) to a new world of resources, his attitude is fundamentally different from Nader supporters who named the Green Party *particularly for* its focus on environmental sustainability.

The Political Science Critique
Nader is more committed than Gore or Kerry to prioritize the environment over *all* other political concerns—hence his inelectability. Clearly for this issue, though, those who are sympathetic to the Green cause should have been expected to fight Bush, and should be expected to fight him in this election. At the least, we should not expect them to knowingly give Bush the opportunity to set environmental and other policy for the world to continue on a dangerous and irreversible course. Yet, that is precisely what has happened—hence the charge of irrational idealism.

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based on the promise of a fundamental challenge to the American two-party system. See below for a discussion about these "deliberate" Green supporters.
[10] http://www.nytimes.com/2004/03/09/opinion/09COOK.html argues that Nader's affect could be similarly damning for Democrats this year. For example, of the 16 states expected to draw a close race between Bush and Kerry, Nader's presence was a serious threat to Gore in Iowa, Minnesota, New Mexico, Oregon, Wisconsin, Washington, Missouri, and Ohio, and cost him New Hampshire and Florida.
[11] LaCrosse, Wisconsin, 18 October, 2000. www.realchange.org/bushjr.htm/

Many voters supported Nader not for this reason, but because they believe in a separate, and in this case overriding, value in political *choice*.[13] The *deliberate* Nader supporter supposes that a) there is something wrong with the two-party system, b) challenging the system eventually can result in a viable Green Party candidate, and perhaps c) only then can an acceptable political agenda (read, radical environmentalism) be implemented. Counter-objections to these misguided political beliefs are simple enough, although it is important to keep in mind that the fundamental issue at hand is an understanding of the environmental situation. (Attached picture taken from http://forums.fark.com/cgi/fark/comments.pl?IDLink=1091786, 1/28/05).

To a) it would take us too far afield to explain more technically why a two-party democratic system most efficiently represents voters' directions of concern. The example from the 2000 election shows basically how extremism works against itself. On their own, theoretical political objections to party polarization may carry some weight; multi-party systems that are already in place may have some advantages over America's system. However, most deliberate Nader supporters, insofar as they are regular people, are not grounded in a system of political theory. Most are merely frustrated by the natural process of compromise, which fails to meet their unrealistic expectations of politics.[14] Such immaturity is no justification.

The remaining deliberate Nader supporters who *do* claim theoretical reasons for wanting to expand party choices must address the process of implementing such a utopic vision. This is where we come to b). Foremost, many theoretically-driven deliberate Nader supporters seem to be overly optimistic about how long it takes to create a new viable political option. Creating a party infrastructure sound enough for a viable presidential campaign would itself take decades, even in a presently established multi-party systems. America's case, however, involves a further difficulty: the addition of a third significant party is a fundamental change to the entire political system. Hence, if b) is possible, it will require a significant amount of time, more time than many assume.[15]

Surely, though, some theoretically-driven deliberate Nader supporters understand this and are prepared for such patience because of c). The essential problem with c) is

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[12] Source unknown.

[13] There are surely others who support Nader for other reasons that do not primarily rest on environmental or political autonomy reasoning. To the few Nader supporters who fall outside the scope of my critique, the justification for their decision is a separate issue.

[14] Frustration with *impropriety* is a separate issue for any political system. Assuming that the addition of a third party will lessen that is foolish. Assuming that the third party itself will be immune from impropriety that is unfortunately naturally present, is equally naïve.

[15] It is doubtful that allegiance (patience) could last those decades. For, it is likely that the concessions necessitated by a third party's elevation to viability would both frustrate supporters and weaken the very motivation for creating the party, the 'third-ness'.

not that it is necessarily wrong to sacrifice now for the (weak) possibility of a future re-prioritization of environmental concerns. That is a rather value-laden issue dependent upon many complex analyses. No, the essential problem is, ironically, that extremists, who themselves become extreme because they understand something about the danger of the issue, fail to see the genuine extremity of our situation. The time frame for implementing an environmental agenda toward sustainability is not infinite. Ecological collapse is near, and hurtling nearer. We cannot wait for a "then" in which to implement a re-orientation toward a balance of sustainability. Only *now* can we work to implement such an agenda, or there will be no "then" within with to work.

Perhaps this analysis sounds overwhelming. All apocalyptic prophecies strike the prophesied as oppressive. However, although the ethical demands lie on us today, I do no intend to imply that our planet will fail in our lifetimes. Yet, every day that we, humanity, do not repent, we draw ourselves closer to the last days. So, the gravity of the environmental apocalypse is a present issue for a future event. The vital question is, how future is future? If we do have power over the apocalypse's culmination—and ethics rests on the assumption that we do, not necessarily the fact—then it is relevant to know the boundaries for using of that power.

The Environmental Situation

The foremost reason why the ecological collapse has become a real concern is the rise in population.[16] Medical advances in the modern era have led to longer life expectancies, rising fertility rates, and greater stress on the Earth. How many more of us can it support, though, and for how long? To address the positive aspects first, one advantage for this planet is its size. The more than six billion of us alive today could stand in just half of Rhode Island.[17] Of course, we require much more space than our feet, for food production, for waste management, for mere habitation, and for the production of necessary goods such as textiles and water. Even a degree of pollution is necessary,[18] although to estimate the raw sustainability of our planet, we should not consider the pollution of unnecessary items like automobiles.

More positive aspects: during the last century, as the population has risen most sharply, we have become more efficient about producing our needs and have learned how to be more careful about waste and pollution management.[19] There is reason to believe that we will improve technologically at these processes in many ways.[20] As well, awareness of conservation and participation in recycling programs is more and more common. Finally, Green industry is proving to be as economically viable as 'regular'

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[16] http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/sixbillion/sixbilpart1.pdf explains that world population has increased from 1.65 billion in 1900, to 6 billion, as of 12 October 1999. From 1 BCE, when the world had about 300 million people, it took over 1600 years to double its population. It took only twelve years to increase from 5 billion to 6 billion (1988-1999).

[17] McKibben, 386

[18] Baxter

[19] However, as over-developed countries like America implement environmental restrictions on their industries, while simultaneously giving businesses *carte blanche* to relocate in other countries, human efficiency and know-how is wasted by companies that opt for foreign, inexpensive labor and environmental de-regulation.

[20] Technology, though, tends to create new problems where it manages temporary solutions. It is foolhardy to lay one's hopes upon it as a saving grace for our environmental problems.

industries. However, regardless how technologically savvy and conservationally aware we become, there is a limit to how many of us this finite planet can sustain.

Dozens of studies have approached the question of raw sustainability from many different perspectives.[21] Some analyze potential food production, although they hold very different assumptions about what counts as "food" and about humanity's caloric needs. Other studies investigate water, but assume different facts about its potability, dispersion, salinity, etc. Still others look at soil and air quality, and some take into account the requirements of other species of plant and animal, and how those systems affect our human situation. When Joel Cohen brought these findings together in *How Many People Can the Earth Support?*, he determined that the average responsible prediction for the planet's raw capacity to sustain is between 7.7 billion and 12 billion people. Considering that the United Nations report on population predicts that our numbers will reach 9 billion by the middle of this century,[22] Cohen's conclusion should be met with some concern.

There is a difference, however, between raw carrying capacity and real sustainability. Carrying capacity is a purely technical question of biological need versus ecological availability. Cohen's analysis only speaks to this. Real sustainability takes into account the separate but very important concern that beyond being *human* animals, we are *people*, and as people we are *social*. In other words, from the capacity of production to the realities of consumption, realistically we must factor the natural, unequal distribution of resources that geography creates and societies exploit. For instance, potable, easily-retrievable water is less than abundant throughout the world; real sustainability requires that we take into account the systems necessary for bringing water to dispersed populations. As well, any realistic estimation of how many people the Earth can sustain must take into account the realities of personal nature: that we are selfish creatures. We will continue to fight wars and hedge our opportunities against others, making efficient co-operation of resource distribution more than difficult.

Even for our most basic needs, if the rule of wealth distribution that has existed for the entire history of humanity continues, resources will always be used inefficiently.[23] And if people continue to desire wealth as they have for the entire history of humanity, resources will be hoarded inefficiently. We cannot function on the assumption that "Peace on Earth and goodwill toward humanity (Luke 2:14)" will arise just when our species is most at risk. They are rather empty statistics, then, that support optimistic predictions for this planet.

A further worry is that "this planet" is undergoing many changes that affect the very bases of the studies that yield these predictions. This planet will be less and less like "this" as the limits of real sustainability come closer. As a closed system, the Earth has undergone and always will have cycles of weather patterns and physical adjustments that affect human and other life. However, in a sense, it is no longer such a closed system. Human influence has altered the very processes that support and protect life. Social activity is changing the way nature can provide for social activity.

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[21] A number of these studies are discussed in McKibben, 388-391.

[22] http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/sixbillion/sixbilpart1.pdf states that world population should achieve 9 billion in 2054, and will stabilize at over 10 billion at the end of the next century.

[23] http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/sixbillion/sixbilpart1.pdf states that in 1900 70% of the population lived in "less-developed" regions. Now that figure is 80%, and it will rise to 90% by 2050.

The issue is well beyond the popular concerns, like pollution-induced ozone depletion. Much more dangerous are the effects of gases usually considered innocuous but that happen to lead to problems when we cause their over-abundance.[24] For example, methane is a naturally occurring gas. When it is introduced into the atmosphere at a rate higher than its molecules can decompose, it helps trap heat in the air. Three significant sources have damaged the methane balance in our atmosphere: cattle waste (we raise many more cattle now than ever before), termite waste (termite population is so much higher than ever because of deforestation), and rice production (billions of people rely on rice as their only economically viable food source). Equally as dangerous is the effect of nitrogen, a gas that naturally composes 80% of our atmosphere. Industry, however, has more than doubled the annual output of nitrogen. The result is a boom in algae, which causes less oxygenated water, killing fish, and more algae waste in the air. That waste, nitrous oxide, decomposes so much slower than we produce it, that it traps more and more heat in our atmosphere. (Attached picture taken from http://www.perspectives.com/forums/forum4/359.html, 1/28/05).

Even worse is the situation with carbon dioxide. This otherwise harmless gas emitted with every breath is emitted much more oppressively by gasoline engines. No matter how efficient engines are at filtering pollutants and conserving gasoline, *every* gallon of gasoline produces 5.5 pounds of CO_2 waste. Before we began to use carbon fuels, the atmosphere held a balance of about 280 parts of CO_2 per million parts of air. In fifty years that number will be 500 ppm, and more than any other factor, this 'safe' gas traps heat in our atmosphere and causes the trend called global warming. It is no longer possible to be suspicious of this process; the planet *is* getting warmer because of 'regular' human activity like this. Pollution is not even the main cause, though that is where the political fights seem to take root. Global warming is a product of us living oblivious to our actions that lead to an imbalanced, unsustainable world.

The temperature will continue to rise by at least a few degrees this century, drying water tables and parching deserts. The melting ice poles potentially will flood coastal areas such as Amsterdam and Venice, eventually New York City and Florida. Even the Gulf Stream could be altered; if so Europe could effectively be rendered inhabitable. Most importantly over the long run, though, warmer air is denser air, which retains water more effectively. This means that rain will fall less often, but when it does, it will rain harder. That dynamic dries topsoil more thoroughly, then washes it away more dramatically. This erosion is devastating to agriculture, a rather important component to planetary sustainability. It is a harsh new world.

> But we don't need worst-case scenarios: best-case scenarios make the point.
> The population of the earth is going to nearly double one more time. That
> will bring it to a level that even the reliable old earth we were born on would
> be hard-pressed to support. Just at the moment when we need everything to

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[24] A solid discussion of the following 'safe' gases, their relationship to atmospheric heat, and heat's ultimate relationship to our changing planet can be found in McKibben, 393-399.

be working as smoothly as possible, we find ourselves inhabiting a new
planet, whose carrying capacity we cannot conceivably estimate.[25]

What we can estimate is the ultimate danger this presents, and the immediacy
with which it presents itself. It is real and it is now, and the moral demands are
considerable and timely. If we postpone action, we will lose the opportunity to act.
Hence, the attempted justification fails; one cannot support Nader under the possibility
that a patient challenge to the two-party system may eventually change it, such that a
candidate with a radical environmental attitude might be electable and might be able to
implement his or her agenda. Greens must come to realize that in the fifty or so years it
would take to present a viable candidate, every reasonable candidate will be facing such
an ecological crisis that even what will appear then as a conservative attitude would
appear to us today as extreme!

The Theological Situation
We are, then, faced with a prophetic call to repent environmentally. Of the many ethical
steps involved in this, the most important one is supporting leaders willing and able to
implement systematic changes. If we do not meet that demand, then no matter how much
recycling we do, no matter how many Lohas[26] buy hybrid automobiles, we push our
planet ever closer to the brink of unsustainability and collapse. If we support Nader, we
usher in an AntiChrist that catapults the world into the Devil's hand of suffering.

"A contemptible person shall arise, on whom royal
majesty had not been conferred."

—Daniel 11:21

On the other hand, if we acknowledge our situation as neighbors on this "cosmic oasis
carefully adrift in the universe,"[27] then perhaps we have a chance to postpone a graceful
demise and lessen the suffering of those future neighbors who will be our last.

As much as we are responsible for the pain leading up to the ecological collapse,
the question remains, can we be responsible for its ultimate collapse? Can creatures with
finite freedom destroy their autonomy, or can only a transcendent/transcendental source
of freedom truly have the power to end finite manifestations of freedom? Although a
final answer to that cannot be know until, well, until we find out, I believe there are four
reasons to suppose that we do have that eschatological power. First, functioning on that
assumption offers a rationale for our ethical demands. If we function on the assumption
that we do *not* have a power over the end of history, we remove ourselves from the
responsibility and guilt that can motivate our action.

Second, in more immediate apocalyptic possibilities, like Kurt Vonnegut's
fictional "Ice-9",[28] there seems to be no functional distinction between the free act that

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[25] McKibben, 398

[26] "Lohas" is a marketing term for consumers interested in "*L*ifestyles *o*f *H*ealth *a*nd *S*ustainability".

[27] Rasmussen, 23

[28] Vonnegut's satire in *Cat's Cradle* addressed the absurdities of the Cold War and of the notion that God
sustains and protects this world, through the possible unleashing of a chemical that instantly freezes
everything it touches, and everything its resultant ice touches, *ad infinitum*. The book's last words sum up

collapses freedom and history, and the causation of the collapse. The act *is* the cause. This situation would be opposed to a situation where a free act causes another 'being' to freely act. In this case the initial act is functionally distinct from the eventual effect, even if a causal chain links them. This dislocated condition is relevant to traditional apocalyptic visions of God reacting to a state of affairs humanity has achieved. Assuming that we have eschatological power over the end of history does not deny the possibility of such a traditional apocalypse, but assuming that such an apocalypse is the *only* possible process does deny the possibility of our having power over it.

If the free act that causes the end of freedom is the very cause of the end of freedom, does this act transcend our freedom? Does it transcend of our finitude, and if so, does that entail its impossibility? The third reason why I suppose we do have eschatological power over the end of history is that, the free act that causes the end of freedom does not, contrary to appearances, transcend of our finite freedom. Paradoxically, we establish our personhood precisely in the act of destroying our personhood.

As finite creatures, our decisions are constrained by our finite perception of history. To *know* the results of our actions would require an eternal eye and would eliminate the genuine choice in actions. Our actions would then be foregone conclusions. Moreover, what establishes our personhood is precisely our freedom to choose amongst options. To be fully aware of the results of our decisions before making them would, then, destroy our autonomy, thus our personhood. Thus, in the act of choosing, we are free people, while it is our essential freedom that presents us with the power to choose. This paradox, if Tillich would allow me to use that term,[29] shows the finitude of an apocalyptic-inducing act. The choice to act, constrained by perception, which is constrained by our participation in and only in the past, makes us free persons. The effect of the act has nothing to do with that essential personhood created in the act of choice. Moreover, our freedom to choose, empowered by our essential personhood and defined by our having genuine choices, makes us necessarily finite creatures. Thus, the power to act such that we end history is as much a manifestation of our finiteness as any act. It can encroach neither on a transcendent God with infinite freedom, nor on a transcendental, infinite ground of freedom.

Still, something appears different about the freedom to destroy freedom. Is it merely a more monumental decision? Or might there be something metaphysically different about our possession of this freedom? Does this capacity make us ontologically different beings than other autonomous beings, and how? Does it even make sense to envision a free being that cannot decide to destroy freedom? I think it does, even if we have to remove the title, "person" from it. However, this possibility reveals my presumption that *deciding* to destroy freedom is an intentional act. If it is a genuinely free act, according to my analysis above, the apocalyptic actor cannot know the result of the act.

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humanity's failure to meet its responsibility in an otherwise meaningless world: "If I were a younger man, I would write a history of human stupidity… thumbing my nose at You Know Who."

[29] Tillich (II, 90-92) explains five mis-uses and one proper use of "paradox" in theology, of which my analysis of freedom and choice seems to have no place. Perhaps I am using the wrong word, but I know of no other word to convey the sense of a circular or mutual foundation of concepts.

To where, then, is the intentionality? Perhaps it is a mark of a genuine decision that one is aware that one as choosing subject. But then apocalyptic actors may have no idea that their act is eschatological. This may further remove tension surrounding the concern about a finite act transcending finitude; but it also seems to open the possibility of an *accidental* apocalyptic act. For instance, I do not know the conditions for the collapse of history, and they may be simply my typing a certain pattern of letters, where, by acting freely in my choice of word, I accidentally bring upon the end of history. That is a disheartening possibility! As well, it begs the question, what type of freedom is necessary to fall into such an accidental condition for causing the apocalypse. That is, if I can unknowingly act in a simple way that happens to cause the apocalypse, then is it not possible that any being with the capacity to act in *that* simple way, can equally cause the apocalypse? If so, then it seems *impossible* to envision a free being that does not have the power to decide to destroy freedom.

On the other hand, perhaps the intentionality within decision can be based on some naturally imperfect *expectation* of result. The expectation would not have to correlate with the actual result, for this to affect the genuineness of a decision. In that case any free being would make decisions insofar as those decisions are based on expectations—natural sounding enough—but only beings with an *awareness* of their possible role in the end of history would be able to freely destroy freedom. Of course, we can construct a thought experiment where free beings without this awareness could destroy history, but only beings with this awareness, namely, persons, could *freely* destroy freedom. That awareness, though, is precisely the awareness of an infinity beyond one's finitude. Hence, we return to the original awkwardness within the relationship between a finite free choice and an infinite result.

This awkwardness, though, does not destroy the motivation for assuming that we have eschatological power. For, we can move past persons and their freedom to God.[30] The fourth reason to assume we have power over the apocalypse, is that to assume that *only* God has power over the end of history and freedom is to constrict one's view of God's nature and God's relationship with the universe. To the former, a God that reserves the power to end history must either exist separate from the universe, or have the power to end God's own existence/self/being. The two are not exclusive, but I suppose theologians accepting one would tend to deny the other. I, however, struggle to accept either. To value God as the sustainer of life, and retain the metaphor of a loving God, God's separateness cannot be *without* the universe, but must be a transcendence *within*, intimately connected to creation. To value God as the creator and as eternal, God's aseity cannot be paralleled by such a power of self-destruction.

Of course various theologies will turn precisely on those issues I have denied. Hence, a second objection to God's having sole power over the end of history is possible. Although we use language rather freely with God, in times of precision we must hesitate to predicate decision-making onto God. If we retain the notion of choice as discussed above—as composing a decision based on incomplete data by a free, self-aware being— we should be uncomfortable with a God in that role, however mundane or cataclysmic a divine choice would be. If, instead, God's power to end history is something God has out

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[30] Of course, I do not intend to imply anything with the designation "God". In my conquests of vagueness, I hope the term can, like Rahner's "mystery (60)", remain open to the breadth of possible conceptualizations: "ground" or "person", distinguishable or panentheistic, transcendent or transcendental.

of necessity, there remains a problem about God being ordained to actualize some power. Where can God's sovereignty lay hold between these? I suggest it can find meaning precisely in God's relationship to the universe.

To assume that God has *sole* power over the end of history tends to take away God's activity through humanity. It assumes a distinction between God's sovereign 'activity' and free acts within the universe. Such a distinction is a problem for predicating any activity to God; for, it begs the question, through what medium does God act. Rather, to suppose that God's sovereignty is precisely that foundation of personal freedom, the infinite source of our capacity to genuinely choose, is to conceive of a God intimately connected with the universe, transcendent within the universe, responsible for history but not determinate of it. Accordingly, this notion of God's sovereignty allows for God to be responsible for the end of history without taking the power away from humanity.

We do have the power, then, to act apocalyptically. In the most essential analysis, however, that action does not lie in our own selves. We take part in God's plan when we act individually or in the ultimate act of history. Therefore, since we are obliged to act ethically in the postponement of suffering associated with the environmental degradation, our role as free beings in God is to support the systematic re-prioritization of ecological sustainability and to fight the evils that inhere in the Bush and Nader agendas. (Attached picture taken from http://www.bettybowers.com/nl_harrypotter.html, 1/28/05).

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