Theology and falsification

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THEOLOGY AND FALSIFICATION

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ABSTRACT

THEOLOGY AND FALSIFICATION

The falsification principle has been used to challenge the meaning of religious statements on the ground that if they are meaningful then they must exclude some possible state of affairs, and therefore be falsifiable. Much contemporary christian dogmatics has attempted to answer this challenge by insisting that religious statements have no logical relations with factual claims and thus the meaning of such theological claims have no connection with the possibility of these claims being falsified.

Insofar as this side-stepping of the falsification challenge is an attempt to insist that God is transcendent, it is in part justified. For if statements about God could be reduced, without loss of meaning to statements about the world, then the word "God" would be identical with some series of natural events, and God could not in any sense transcend the world.

But the complete detachment of factual claims from religious claims, which is made by much recent christocentric dogmatics, can be maintained only at the price of making religious belief totally mind dependent. Any religion however, that claims that God has revealed himself at a particular time, in a particular place, cannot avoid making claims referring to God which are logically related to statements of fact this is particularly true of christianity if it seriously claims to be a historical religion. For to claim that Jesus died on the cross for the sins of the world entails the statement that Jesus died on a cross. Thus, if it is not true as a matter of historical fact that Jesus died on the cross, it logically cannot be true that He didd on the cross for the sins of the world.

THE PREFACE

The dispute about whether theological language is meaningful arose acutely with the logical positivist movement in the middle and late 1920's. This challenge was given a new sharpness by the explicit application of the principle of falsification to theological language in the early 1950's. The debate, revived, and to some extent directed by Professor A.G.N.Flew is still a very live and controversial philosophical issue.

The area covered by the relation of theology to the falsification principle is a vast one. I will attempt to deal with an issue which is logically prior to falsification, that is, in what sense if any, religious statements are falsifiable: for philosophers are primarily concerned with the conditions under which religious statements are falsifiable and not the practical action of going out to conduct the necessary falsifications. Indeed, where theological statements are closely related to factual beliefs, such as historical or sociological claims, the statements taken from these subjects, which would provide a falsification of a theological claim must be established as true or false by professional historians and sociologists etc. The philosopher is thus concerned with the meaning of religious statements: and this involves an investigation of how far the principle of falsifiability is connected with their meaning, and if they are logically related to other types of non-theological statements. The philosopher is not interested so much in the truth of theological statements: for unless theological statements are meaningful, they cannot possibly be true.

It is impossible, even within these limits to discuss every aspect of the falsifiability of theological statements. I wish to consider the claim of so much theology, that it is possible to counter the falsification principle by making theological statements completely unrelated to any statements of fact. This theological isolationism is particularly

characteristic of the christocentric theology in much contemporary dogmatics. I will therefore be primarily concerned with the question of how, if at all, theological statements are logically related to factual statements. The answer to this prior question will throw light on how far, the meaning of theological statements depends on whether they are falsifiable.

This thesis is a revision of a thesis submitted in July 1971. I now find myself unable to sustain some of the claims made about the relation of statements describing the creation and resurrection to the falsification of theological statements. I have therefore deleted the former sections on these topics, and tried to clarify my arguments about the relation of statements of faith to statements of fact.

PART I

THE LOGICAL POSITIVIST CHALLENGE.

CHAPTER I

THE LOGICAL POSITIVIST CHALLENGE

I. The Challenge

The Logical Positivists were not the first empiricists to challenge the meaning of religious statements. David Hume in the eighteenth century demanded that any statement which is to be considered meaningful must be either a statement of a matter of fact, or a statement about the relations between ideas. A statement which is neither of these has no cognitive value. Thus Hume suggests that metaphysics and divinity are meaningless combinations of words, and should be burnt at once. He writes:

"If we take into our hand any volume of divinity or school metaphysics, for instance; let us ask, Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number? No. Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact or existence? No. Commit it to the flames, for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion."[1]

The Logical Positivists, who formed the Vienna Circle in the 1920s and 1930s adopted a similar attitude to metaphysics and theology.[2]

Hence A.J. Ayer condemns all statements containing the word "god" as meaningless, because such statements are neither verifiable by sense experience, nor are they true by definition. He asserts:

"To say that "God exists" is to make a metaphysical utterance which cannot be either true or false. And by the same criterion, no statement which purports to describe the nature of a transcendent God can possess any literal significance."[3]

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1. David Hume: Enquiries concerning human understanding and concerning the principles of morals. ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge. Oxford. p.165

2. For the history of the Vienna Circle see: Victor Kraft: The Vienna Circle. Eng. trans. Chicago University press 1953.

3. A.J. Ayer. Language, truth and logic. 2nd ed. 1946 p.115.

The Logical Positivists' challenge differs from that of Hume, however, because they state it in logical rather than psychological terms; propositions and states of affairs are the key terms, rather than impressions and ideas. The aim of the Logical Positivists was to produce a philosophy of science, or a science of philosophy which would put an end to the chaos of competing philosophical systems so common to traditional philosophy, and to provide the final philosophy, in which, given time, all disputes would be solved. Thus the great leader of the Circle, Moritz Schlick made the claim:

"We now find ourselves at an altogether decisive turning point in philosophy, and we are objectively justified in thinking that an end has come to the fruitless conflict as systems. We are in possession of methods which make every such conflict in principle unnecessary. What is now required is their resolute application."[4]

The Logical Positivists thought they possessed an epistemological tool which would end once and for all philosophical disputes, and banish metaphysics forever from philosophy. This was their famous verification principle. This principle stated that the meaning of a statement is its method of verification.[5]

More precisely, they argued that two types of statement only possess cognitive meaning: Firstly, empirical statements which are true either because they describe states of affairs we can observe, or in combination with other statements which describe what we can observe, entail a statement which describes a state of affairs we can observe, which is not entailed solely by the statements we bring in to make the deduction; Secondly, tautological statements, such as the statements of mathematics and logic, which are true in virtue of the definition of the terms involved in the statements concerned.

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4. Moritz Schlick: "The turning point in philosophy" Erkenntnis. Vol. I 1930/31. Reprinted in A.J. Ayer: Logical Positivism Glencoe Illinois 1959 p. 54.

5. Moritz Schlick: Gesammelte Aufsatze 1926-36. Vienna 1938 p.181.

The Logical Positivists were thus primarily concerned with developing a criterion whereby statements could be judged to be meaningful or meaningless. The question whether or not a particular statement is meaningful is obviously a more fundamental question than whether the particular statement is true. For a meaningful statement may or may not be true, but a meaningless statement can be neither true nor false. Thus for example, the statement "John is a black man", may be either true or false; but the statement "this square has two sides" is meaningless, because it is a self contradiction, and so it can be neither true nor false. The primary concern of Logical Positivists is therefore with the meaning of statements rather than with their truth. As Schlick stated:

"Science should be defined as "the pursuit of truth", and philosophy as "the pursuit of meaning"[6]

2. Verification and Meaning

The Logical Positivists challenged theology on the ground that the statements it contains are meaningless. But this challenge can have a real bite only if the Positivists themselves can make clear what it means to say the meaning of a statement is its method of verification. This they failed to do; in fact the meaning of the verification principle was refined and changed, but agreement was never reached on a satisfactory statement of the principle.

At first many Logical Positivists argued that the meaning of a statement is identical with its method of verification. Thus to know the meaning of a statement it must be possible to discover a set of circumstances, a, b, c, etc., such that if these circumstances exist the proposition describing them will be true; if not the proposition will be false. Schlick at first argued that statements describing states of affairs in the world are

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6. Schlick. Op. cit. p.126

meaningful, because the words used in any such statements can be ostensively defined. He wrote:

"The act of verification in which the path to solution finally ends is always of the same sort: it is the occurance of a definite fact that is confirmed by observation, by means of immediate experience. It always comes to an end in actual pointings, in exhibiting what is meant, thus in real acts; only these acts are no longer capable of, or in need of further explanation"[7]

Ostensive definition however does not really help to explain the meaning of a term. Suppose someone asks me to explain what a Gothic arch is. I could take him to York Minster and point out an example. But this pointing would not by itself make unequivocally clear what a Gothic arch is. For my friend may think that my pointings are directed at the colour of the stone or to the type of stone.

In order to overcome this difficulty of the ambiguity involved in simple ostensive definition, some Logical Positivists retreated from the position that experience verifies and is thus the meaning of a proposition, and instead adopted the belief that it is propositions that verify, and propositions are therefore the meaning of the other propositions which they verify. Thus Neurath argued that propositions are verified or falsified, not by appeal to experience, but by their consistency or lack of consistency with the body of statements of unified science in existence at the present time. He wrote:

"When a new sentence is presented to us, we compare it with the system at our disposal, and determine whether or not it conflicts with the system. If the sentence does conflict with the system we may regard it as useless (or false)—— one may on the other hand accept the sentence, and so change the system that it remains consistent even after the adjunction of the new sentence. The sentence would then be called 'true'"[8]

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7. Schlick: "The turning point in philosophy" Op. Cit. p.54

8. Otto Neurath: "Erkenntnis" vol. III 1932/33. Ayer. Op. cit. p.203

Neurath's position has difficulties of its own. It is clearly an abandonment of a rigid empiricist criterion of meaning, and a retreat to a form of the coherence theory of truth. If coherence with the body of unified science is made the sole criterion of the meaning of a statement, it is logically possible that two equally coherent systems of unified science might be discovered, and there would be no good reasons for adhering to one such system rather than the other. The Idealist proviso might be added that it is possible for there to be only one coherent system of propositions. But there seem to be no reasons, apart from aesthetic ones, for thinking that only one logically coherent system is possible.

A further difficulty for Neurath is this: if we can understand the veryifying propositions without actually verifying them, then why are we unable to understand the original propositions in exactly the same way? If however, we need to verify the verifying propositions, and then to verify the verifying verifying propositions, we have produced an infinite regress of verifying procedures. The only way out of such a dilemma is to say that some propositions can be directly verified; that the truth of some propositions can be read off directly from their structure or form. The difficulties of this position were just the ones Neurath's coherence theory of the meaning of propositions had hoped to avoid.

Rudolf Carnap attempted to provide verifying statements when he introduced "Reports", or "Protocol" statements. He draws a crucial distinction between the material and formal mode of statements. In the material mode "protocol Statements", "describe directly given experience or phenomena"; but in the formal mode they are defined as "statements needing no justification, and serving as the foundation for all the remaining statements of science"[9]

He thinks that philosophers, at least, should abandon the material mode of speech because it inevitably gives rise to pseudo-problems such as how protocol language is related to the language of physics, or how protocol

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9. R. Carnap. The Unity of Science. p.45.

statements are related to ordinary language statements describing the material world.

At this point Carnap is producing ultimate verifying propositions by stealth: he supposes that protocol statements are guaranteed because they refer to "the given"; but they can serve as the basic sentences of science only on the condition that we forget altogether their relation to the given, and treat them simply as statements. Thus in the Logical Syntax of Language, Carnap will allow no ultimate protocol statements, the truth of which is determined by their correspondance, or lack of correspondance with the facts. Truth means in the material mode the fact that a proposition is adopted by natural scientists in the present cultural epoch. In the formal mode truth is "the system which contains the sentence, all sentences of a given language N are accepted by scientists a', a", a"' etc." This coherence theory of meaning is very similar to that of Neurath, and is open to exactly the same objections.

In the beginning the Logical Positivists had identified meaning and truth. The various difficulties presented by this identification resulted in the relationship being defined more loosely. This is well illustrated by the distinction which was drawn between verifiability in practice, and verifiability in principle. At first the Logical Positivists argued that a statement is meaningful if, and only if, we can actually carry out the necessary observations or tests which constitute the verification of the statement. Thus I can verify the statement that there are tin mines in operation in Cornwall, by going there and seeing the tin mines. But many statements which are obviously not nonsensical cannot be verified in practice. For example the statement "there is oil under the surface of Venus" cannot be verified in practice at the present, because man has not the technical capacity yet to drill for oil on Venus. We can however state what observations are in principle necessary to verify the statement that there is oil under the surface of Venus.

We know what it would be like to send a rocket to Venus, and we also know what it is like to drill for oil. Thus this statement can be verified in principle, and this is sufficient to establish that it has meaning. As Schlick wrote:

"We call a proposition verifiable if we are able to describe a way of verifying it, no matter whether the verification can actually be carried out or not. It suffices to say what must be done, even if no one will ever be able to do it."[10]

Thus meaning is no longer identified with the actual process of verification, but rather with human beings' ability to imagine the process of verification.

The claim that meaning and verification are identical was attenuated even further when the distinction was drawn between strong and weak verification. A proposition is verifiable in the strong sense, if and only if its truth can be conclusively established in experience. Thus I can strongly verify the statement there are twenty books on my bookcase, simply by counting the number of books lying on my shelves. Universal affirmative statements such as "arsenic is poisonous" cannot, however, be verified in the strong sense. For the statement refers to all examples of arsenic, past, present and future, and it is impossible to observe the behaviour of arsenic in the remote past or the distant future. Therefore, if it is insisted that a statement has meaning if it can be verified strongly, then all universal generalisations, including many scientific laws, must be classified as meaningless.

In order to avoid reducing science to a collection of meaningless laws some Logical Positivists formulated the weak verification principle. According to this principle a statement is verifiable if it is possible for experience to render it probable; or in other words if "some possible sense experience would be relevant to the determination of its truth or falsehood"[11]

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10. M. Schlick: Gesammelte Aufsatze. Op. cit. p.183

11. A.J. Ayer. Language, truth and logic. Op. Cit. p.11 cf. also pp.37 ff.

Here meaning and verification are no longer being identified; they are merely being described as "relevant" to each other. But the term "relevant" is so vague that it is hard to pin down exactly what relationship is being said to exist between them.

It is clear from the above discussion that the relation between meaning and verification underwent a series of metamorphoses at the hands of the Logical Positivists. Their failure to agree about the meaning of "meaning" led to a more radical question being asked about the nature of meaning. Were the Logical Positivists correct in assuming that they could find "the" criterion of meaning? For to ask the question "what is meaning?" is to ask a theory loaded question. It presupposes that meanings exist in some sense. The Logical Positivists seem at times to have been mislead by the dogma that to mean is to name. According to this doctrine, a word has meaning if it names a particular entity: thus the word "London" is meaningful because it names the city of London: in a similar way, it has been argued a general noun such as the word "dog" is meaningful because it names something ------ if not all dogs, at least some sort of subsistent dogginess. In a like manner to assert that "to mean is to verify" presupposes that there are meanings which are independent of the statements said to be meaningful, and these meanings verify or falsify a particular statement. The Logical Positivists in fact seem to have moved from the dogma that words are meaningful because they name something to the dogma that statements are meaningful because they name something.

In other words the Logical Positivists identification of meaning and verification is based on the unquestioned assumption that there is one single all embracing answer to the question "how are sentences meaningful?" Or "what do sentences mean?" There seem to be three reasons for supposing that this is a logically improper question. Firstly such questions can be asked only on the false assumption that they are factual questions.

Secondly, such questions assume all sentences have something in common which can be described as their meaning.

Thirdly such questions assume that meaning involves reference to extra linguist ic entities. None of these assumptions are justified by the Logical Positivists.[12]

3. Falsification and meaning

Karl Popper tried to overcome the difficulties inherent in the verification principle by substituting for it complete falsifiability in principle. Popper was never a member of the Vienna Circle, but he published the first edition of "The Logic of Scientific Discovery"[13] as a volume in the series entitled Schriften zur Wissenschaftliche Weltaufassung, and as a result his name became closely associated with the members of the Vienna Circle.

In this book, Popper argues that Universal Laws cannot be deduced logically from particular observations of experience. Scientific method is not an inductive method which requires some kind of justification: it is always a deductive method. The psychological process by which the scientist arrives at a general law which is his hypothesis is logically irrelevant. Thus Popper writes:

"All that matters is that particular statements are materially implied by universal affirmative statements, and that the particular statements in question are falsifiable or imply statements that are falsifiable. Universal statements are never derivable from singular statements, but can be contradicted by singular statements. What characterises empirical method is its manner of exposing to falsification in every conceivable way, the system to be tested. It aims not to save the lives of untenable systems, but to select the one that is by comparison the fittest, by exposing them all to the fiercest struggle for survival. The method of falsification presupposes no inductive inference, but only the tautological transformations of deductive logic, whose validity are not in dispute."[14]

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13. Original title "Logic der Forschung"

14. K. Popper. The logic of scientific discovery. Hutchinson 1959 pp. 41-42

In The Logic of Scientific Discovery Popper will not allow the use of basic or observation sentences to which a theory or law must be reduced in order to be meaningful. To search for an ultimate ground for a theory or law is looking for a metaphysicians[1] fairy tale. The basic statements which will falsify a theory are a matter of convention, and therefore which statements are accepted as basic ~~are~~ is determined by the theory in question, and the purpose for which it is to be used.[15] Thus he reports: "Coming to an agreement on basic statements is like other kinds of application to perform a purposeful action guided by various theoretical considerations. The connexions between our various experiences are explicable or deducible in terms of the theories we are engaged in testing. Theory dominates the experimental work from its initial planning, to the finished touches in the laboratory"[16]

Popper unlike the Logical Positivists was not interested in putting forward a general criterion for the meaning of all statements. Thus he claims: "I was never interested in the so called problem of meaning; on the contrary it appeared to me a verbal problem, as a typical pseudo-problem. I was interested only in scientific demarcation."[17] In other words Popper is primarily interested in distinguishing scientific statements from the statements of metaphysics and other subjects like astrology. But unlike the Logical Positivists, he does not condemn metaphysics as meaningless and nonsensical, for some metaphysical theories have led to useful advances in scientific knowledge.[18] Some Metaphysicians, and many astrologers

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15. In his later writings however Popper is much less an instrumentalist. cf. "Three views concerning human knowledge" Reprinted in Conjectures and Refutations Routledge. 2nd. ed. 1965. pp. 97 ff.

16. Popper. Logic of scientific discovery. Op. cit. pp. 106-107

17. "Philosophy of science: A personal report" Reprinted in C.A.Mace. British philosophy in the mid-century. 1st ed. 1957. Allen and Unwin p. 114.

18. Cf. Popper: Logic of Scientific Discovery. Op. cit. p.278 "Three views concerning human knowledge" Op. cit.

however attempt to confirm that statements they make by appealing to empirical evidence. For example, an astrologer might claim that everyone born in December is sexually promiscuous. There are many peoples' lives which will confirm this, but astrologers are most reluctant to put such a statement to the test of falsifiability. It is just the willingness of the scientist to put his theories to the test of falsifiability which distinguishes his subject from non-scientific enterprises.

4. The Metaphysics of Logical Positivism

In spite of the violent attack made on metaphysics by the Logical Positivists, some aspects of their philosophy bear a close resemblances to traditional metaphysical theories.

Firstly, Logical Positivism has close affinities with rationalism. This is shown particularly clearly by their insistence that there must be an absolutely certain base for knowledge; unless statements can be reduced to incorrigible statements describing sense contents, there can be no certain knowledge. In fact the Positivists' distinction between the ultimate and the derivative is clearly prefigured in Seventeenth Century rationalism. As Reichenbach said of Carnap: "His theory ma y be regarded after a fashion, as a modern fulfilment of Descartes' quest for an absolutely certain basis for science; and indeed Carnap's theory is reminiscent of Descartes' rationalism in more ways than one"[19]

Secondly the Logical Positivists do not provide an empirical account of how statements happen to be meaningful. The statement that the meaning of a statement is its method of verification cannot be verified by sense experience. They are rather defining an empirical sentence as one which is empirically verifiable --- they are proposing a definition of the term "empirical" and on the basis of this definition they attempt to limit the range of meaningful

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19. "Logical empiricism in Germany" Journal of Philosophy. March 1936 p.149.

sentences. At this point they clearly assume that all words mean in the same way, that the rules determining the use of words work according to one rigid formula. But, who are philosophers to decree in advance the types of statement which are meaningful?

Thirdly, the Logical Positivists have assumed that scientific statements are the Standard type of meaningful statements. But this is to take up a metaphysical position based on the belief that scientific knowledge is the only genuine type of knowledge.

5. The Attack on Theology

Classical Positivists saw theology as a branch of metaphysics: as such it must be ruled out as meaningless without taking the trouble to examine in detail the claims it makes. Ayer is one of the few Positivists who considered theology to deserve more than slighting footnote.

Ayer dismisses any kind of the ontological argument for God's existence, by appeal to the empiricist dogma that all existential statements are synthetic. No 'a priori' statement can be anything but analytic and thus tautologous: thus no factual knowledge can be acquired by mere reasoning alone.

Ayer, then denies that there is any empirical way to knowledge of God. Theological statements must be either observation statements, or be reducible to observation statements, in which case they are nothing over and above descriptions of ordinary phenomena in the world; or theological statements refer beyond the range of observation statements, in which case, they are metaphysical and therefore meaningless. "If the sentence, 'God exists' entails no more than that certain types of phenomena occur in certain sequences, then to assert the existence of a god, will be simply equivalent to asserting that there is the requisite regularity in nature ——— if 'god' is a metaphysical term, then it cannot be even probable that a god exists. For to say that 'God exists' is to make a metaphysical utterance which cannot be either true or false".[20]

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20. Language, Truth and Logic. p.115

Ayer's position is not that of agnostic or atheist: the agnostic claims there is insufficient evidence to verify the statement "there is a God", and the atheist that there is enough evidence to falsify the statement 'God exists'. Positivists think that neither theism nor atheism is capable of being true for both sets of statements are nonsensical: theological propositions are not genuine propositions at all.

Theists are misled by the grammatical form of the statement "God exists" into thinking that because "God" is grammatically a proper name, there must be an entity which this name names. But the word "God" does not operate in the same way logically, as proper names such as "this" or "that". The word "God" has a connotations such as "all powerful", "all knowing", "the Father of Jesus Christ"; whereas a logically proper name denotes, but never connotes. Thus: "the mere existence of the noun is enough to foster the illusion that there is a real, or at any rate, a possible entity corresponding to it"[21]

Religious experience is also useless as evidence for God's existence. The possibility cannot be ruled out 'a priori' that some persons may have a sort of intuitive knowledge of God: we can wait however, until the religious believer produces the propositions he claims to have learnt by intuition, and then see if they stand up to the test of experiencial verification. Such propositions will either be solely about the believer's psychological experience, in which case they are mind-dependent, and not relevant to the validity of the argument; or the propositions will refer to a being who transends the believer's experience, in which case they are nonsensical metaphysical statements. "It follows that those philosophers who fill their books with assertions that the intuitively know this or that moral or religious "truth", are merely providing material for the psycho-analyst."[22]

Ayer's treatment of the philosophy of religion is highly metaphysical. In the six pages which he devotes to the subject in Language, Truth and Logic,

21. Ayer, op. cit. p.116

22. Ayer, op. cit. p.120

not one reference is made either to the great writings of any one of the World religions, e.g. The Upanishads, The Koran, The Bible, or to any significant ancient or modern work on philosophical theology. He refuses to look at what is actually said and done by religious believers when they worship, pray, or philosophise. Thus Passmore writes: "There is to my knowledge no Positivist writing which analyses at all thoroughly the doctrines Positivism condemns. This anti-historical, anti-scholarly tendency is another legacy of scientism"[23] This class of "experiences" is to be discounted 'a priori'. But Ayer gives no criteria for deciding which classes of experiences are to be allowed to count as possibly genuine experiences, and which not.

Classical Positivism was dead by the early 1940s. In England and the United States, "Linguistic Analysis" has developed through the influence of the early positivists. But the Linguistic Analysts see the positive function of philosophy, not as the saying of the unsayable in order to facilitate the elimination of Metaphysics, but the task of analysing statements to see where they fit in the map of knowledge. Each statement is examined on its own merits to see what it means: hence the Positivist programme of laying down one criterion for meaningful informative statements is explicitly abandoned. The tendency to define meaning in terms of use did crop up in early Positivism however, at points where a rigid form of the verification principle was likely to exclude sets of statements which had to be included, .e.g. statements of the laws of science. Schlick writes: "Verifiability which is the sufficient and necessary condition of meaning is the possibilitynof logical order; it is created by constructing the sentence in accordance with the rules by which its terms are defined. The only case in which verification is (logically) impossible is the case where you have made it impossible by not setting any rules for its verification."[24]

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23. John Passmore. "Logical Positivism III" Australian Journal of Philosophy. Vol. XXVI. 1948. p.8

24. Quoted J. Passmore: A Hundred years of Philosophy. Pelican ed. p.372

The Positivist quest for an absolutely certain and indubitable base for all human knowledge is dead. The early rigid criterion of meaning still seems to linger on - a sort of background music rather than a symphony listened to carefully. Current English philosophy is absorbed by the doctrines of the later Wittgenstein, which tends to be summarised by the slogans "don't ask for meaning, but ask for use", "Every statement has its own logic". Yet there is a tendency to admit this broad criterion of meaning until it appears to give meaning to statements which a particular philosopher does not wish to accept; e.g. some religious or metaphysical statements, and then the linguistic analyst falls back on some form of the verification theory of meaning to exclude these "language games".

Professor A.G.N. Flew in his polemic against religious belief seems to hover between meaning is verifiability and meaning is use. In discussing the freedom of the will, Flew is prepared to admit that the free-will language game is played: "free-will" has a use in ordinary language. Further, any concept which has a use in ordinary language must have been used on at least one occasion ostensively, otherwise the use of the word in question could never have been taught. "A paradigm case of acting freely, of being free to choose, would be the marriage of two normal young people, when there was no question of the parties 'having to get married', and no social or parental pressure on either of them...." If this is not what the phrase free-will means than "it is hard to see what meaning these expressions have, and how, if at all they could ever be taught, understood, or correctly used."[25]

If Flew's paradigm case argument is correct, a word or phrase which has a use in a common language, must denote at least one object, otherwise this concept could not have been taught. But if so, then miracles must happen, witchcraft must be possible, and there must exist several different gods. Flew in fact, produced an ontological argument for the existence of every concept.

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25. "Divine Omnipotence and human freedom": New Essays in Philosophical Theology, pp. 149, 151. Cf. "Philosophy and Language": Essays in Conceptual Analysis, p.1

In his paper on Theology and Falsification[26] Flew refuses to admit that Theology, because it forms a language game of its own, with many of its words in ordinary everyday use, ever produces any paradigm cases. He demands that if theological statements are to be meaningful, they must be directly or indirectly falsifiable. If nothing can be described as relevant falsifying evidence for the statements "God exists" and "God loves mankind", then Christian Theism is literally meaningless. "Now it often seems to people who are not religious as if there was no conceivable event or series of events, the occurrence of which would be admitted by sophisticated religious people to be a sufficient reason for conceding "There wasn't a God after all", or "God does not really love us then".... "If there is nothing which a putative assertion denies, then there is nothing which it asserts either; and so it is not really an assertion."[27]

This is a classical positivism in one of its most naive forms. One or two statements are taken (e.g. "God exists" or "God loves mankind"), and it is assumed that these simple statements represent what the whole body of Christian doctrine asserts, and hence what it denies. It is not easy, however, to pin point what form of the Positivist theory of meaning Flew is recommending. In fact he seems to have taken over a fairly primitive form of the verification principle. For, if whatever counts against a proposition is part of its meaning, a proposition is meaningless unless it proponent will admit that in certain circumstances it can be falsified. Flew in fact seems to be identifying meaning and falsification in much the same way that the early Positivists identified meaning and verification; and any such identification is open to the same objections.

Surprisingly, in his article on "Theology and falsification" Flew does not take account of the complexity of Karl Popper's analysis of the falsification principle.[28] Popper does not put forward the falsification

26. Op. cit. p.96. ff.
27. Op. cit. p.98
28. Cf. The Logic of Scientific Discovery. passim.

principle as a criterion of meaning; and so for Popper if a statement is not falsifiable, it does not follow that it is meaningless. He admits that some of the statements of metaphysics, although not themselves falsifiable, have led to important scientific discoveries the results of which are falsifiable. In the same way some statements of theology are not falsifiable; but it would seem to follow from this, not that such statements are meaningless, but simply that they are not scientific statements. For Popper put forward the principle of falsification not with the intention of using it as a criterion, for distinguishing meaningful from meaningless statements; but rather it was intended to be a principle to demarcate scientific from non scientific statements.[29] So on this basis, the fact that some theological statements cannot be falsified will not show that they are meaningless: it will show only that they are not scientific statements——a somewhat harmless conclusion.

Flew also seems to be unclear as to whether he is interested in the falsifiability of theology or the falsification of theology. If, as Flew claims, theological statements are meaningful, if, and only if, they are falsifiable, then he is invoking a form of falsifiability in principle, very similar in kind to verifiability in principle. In this instance in order to show a theological statement is meaningful, all a believer has to do is to point to what he considers is a logically relevant statement, which if true, would contradict the theological claim he is making. In the same way, in order to show the statement that there is oil under the surface of Venus is meaningful, all that need to be done to show this statement is falsifiable in principle is to point out that we can imagine a situation that will falsify it. For example, oil rigs being erected on Venus, and yet their drills never striking oil. But, on Flew's principle of falsifiability, the falsifiability of a statement is no indication of its truth or falsity. For example we can state what will falsify the statement that there is oil under the surface of Venus: but this statement can only be shown to be true or false if actual tests

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29. Cf. above. pp. 8 ff.

are carried out in practice, and oil is not found under the surface of Venus. Similarly, even if Flew is right in asserting that there is a close connexion between the meaning and falsifiability in the case of theological statements, the fact that they are falsifiable, if they are, will show only that such theological statements have meaning, not whether they are true or false.

6. The response

The Logical Positivists and their recent followers have challenged theologians to explain how theological statements are meaningful, if they have any meaning at all. This challenge raises two questions: Firstly, is the demand that theological statements should be verifiable or falsifiable relevant to theological statements? For if theological statements are not fact-claiming, or cognitive statements in some sense, then they could possess a meaning of some sort, without being verifiable of falsifiable. I will examine a number of attempts by theologians to argue that theological statements are of a logically different type from ordinary factual statements, and therefore it is inappropriate logically to insist that they should be verified or falsified. Secondly, if theological statements are, in some sense fact claiming, in what ways if any, are they verifiable of falsifiable?

In this thesis I will attempt to answer these two fundamental questions.

PART II

FIDEISM

PART II

FIDEISM

"The meaning of a statement is determined by the procedures through which it can be empirically verified or falsified". Whatever the logical status of this statement may be, is it an appropriate demand to make of theological statements? Is it a type error being committed in demanding empirical falsification of theological statements? If religious statements are of a logical type which is "wholly other" from all types of non-religious statements or assertions then a category mistake is being committed every time any attempt is made to verify theological statements by means of empirical checking procedures. Further, if theological statements are logically of a different type from all other non-religious statements, then there may be no logical relations at all between theological and non theological statements.

The position often known as Fideism is an attempt to provide an answer to the logical positivist challenge to the meaning of theological language, by denying that empirical verification or falsification procedures are appropriate to theological language. The Fideist claims the only knowledge man can have of God is knowledge God Himself graciously gives to man. Since the doctrine of justification by faith only is true, man can know God solely with the aid of God's grace, and never even dimly by use of his own reasoning powers and logical techniques.

Fideism is a theological position which is as old as the Reformation and has roots in both the New Testament and the Fathers. No passage in the New Testament that I know of can be interpreted in such a way that it can mean only that no reasons can be given for believing in God because God's grace alone can give a person such belief. Several New Testament passages suggest a fideistic attitude. A typical example is Colossians: "See to it that no one makes prey of you by philosophy and empty deceit according to the human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ."[1]

1. Colossians 2:8 R.S.V. text.

Irenaeus and Tertullian of the early Latin Fathers are both deeply suspicious and at times hostile to contemporary philosophy. Irenaeus restricted the function of theology to the mundane task of expanding and clarifying the doctrines set out by the scriptures.[2] Tertullian went further still and adopted a fully fledged Fideist position. He claimed that the central beliefs of the Christian faith were certain because they were impossible In reply to Marcion, Tertullian wrote: "What is unworthy of God will do for me... the son of God was born; because it is shameful, I am not ashamed: and the son of God dies; just because it is absurd it is to be believed; and he was buried and rose again; it is certain because it is impossible."[3]

The full flowering of the Fideist position had to wait for the Reformation. There is a frequent tendency in Reformation theology with its concentration on the doctrine of justification by faith alone, to assert that there are no logical relations between statements about God and statements about the world: apart from God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ, which is made known to man by God's grace, nothing can be known about God. The image of God in man, or in less Augustinian terminology, the rational and moral powers of man, have been destroyed by the fall, and can be used in such a way that they substitute idolatrous concepts in the place of the God the living and the true.

Luther wrote: "reason" is the devil's greatest whore; by nature and manner of being she is a noxious whore; she is a prostitute, the devil's appointed whore, whore eated by scab and leprosy who ought to be trodden underfoot and destroyed, she and her wisdom..... Throw dung in her face to make her ugly. She is and she ought to be drowned in baptism."[4]

Whatever may be the naivities to which fideistic apologetic descends in popular presentations of Reformation theology, Luther's position is not the

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2. Irenaeus: Ad. Haer. 2.26. in J.N.D. Kelly: Early Christian Doctrines, p.4

3. Translation of De carne Christi: Quoted in Bernard Williams: "Tertullian's paradox" New Essays in Philosophical Theology, p.190

4. Erlangen ed. Sämtliche Werke 16 pp.142-148

simple rejection of the possibility of any rational knowledge of God which the passage quoted above might suggest. Luther distinguishes three different ways in which rational arguments can be developed.

Firstly, natural reason when applied to the "earthly kingdom", to objects and concepts in this world, is being used in the legitimate sphere, the sphere for which God created it to be used. Because of the adequacy of natural reason when applied within the bounds of sense, God found no need, Luther suggests, to teach us how to build houses, make clothing, marry, wage war, etc. in the scriptures.[5]

Secondly, if natural reason taken by itself is used with concepts applicable in the heavenly kingdom only, reason is trespassing on the domain of faith. "But in Godly affairs.....where man must do what is acceptable with God and be saved thereby, here nature is absolutely stone blind, so that it cannot even catch a glimpse of what those things are."[6]

Thirdly, Luther thinks reason can be correctly employed with concepts taken from the heavenly kingdom, if human reason is regenerated by faith, and is always the humble servant of the Word of God. Luther wrote: "Without faith, reason is no use and can do nothing..... but when illuminated reason takes its thoughts from the Word."[7]

The Reformers, despite their radical application of the doctrine of justification by faith only to Medieval Theology never explicitly concentrated the purgative powers of the doctrine onto theories of epistemology. This has been done in the twentieth century by three leading Protestant theologians, Tillich, Bultmann and Barth.

Tillich formulates this grace-centred epistemology into what he calls the "Protestant Principle". This forbids the identification of anything ultimate, of anything that is divine, with anything that is part of this world. Nothing

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5. Cf. Postil for Epiphany on Isaiah LX, 1-6, from Postils 1552

6. Postils. 1552 Postil for Epiphany on Isaiah LX, 1-6

7. Quoted B.A. Gerrish: Grace and Reason. Chapter 1

which is not divine must be given divine status: neither the Church nor the sacraments must be confused or identified with God Himself; if they are, they become idols, a substitute for the true utterly transcendent and gracious God. Tillich claims: "Protestant theology protests in the name of the Protestant Principle against identification of our ultimate concern with any creation of the Church including Biblical writings insofar as their witness to what is really ultimate concern is also a conditional expression of their own spirituality."[8]

Similarly, Bultmann asserts that if the doctrine of jusification by faith only is true, the claim that man can know anything in any sense of God independently of God's special revelation is false. This is because, if man, by efforts of his own reasoning comes to know God, however imperfectly, then man would have performed one action independently of God's gracious help, and wouldthus not be justified by faith alone. As Bultmann puts it: "There is no difference between security based on good works, and security built on objectifying knowledge..... faith in God, like faith in justification refuses to single out qualified and definable actions as holy actions. Correspondingly faith in God, like faith in creation, refuses to single out qualified and definable realms from among the observable realities of nature and history."[9]

In Chapter Two I will discuss Karl Barth's claim that the doctrine of justification by faith only implies the logical irrelevance of any verification or falsification procedures in religious language. I am however, attempting a limited task: an examination of the consequences of the claims Barth makes about the relation of his epistemological theories to the doctrine of justification by faith alone. I must point out most emphatically that I will examine what the early Barth has to say on the relation between reason and faith, and I will only introduce brief discussions of points of his later theology, insofar as these throw light on the position Barth adopted when he

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8. Systematic Theology. Vol. I, pp.42-43; Nisbet ed.

9. Jesus Christ and Mythology, p.84

wrote the first volume of Church Dogmatics. I concentrate my discussion on the early Barth for two reasons; Firstly because this position of the early Barth is a theological parallel at many points to the attitude and position of the Logical Positivists. Secondly, Church Dogmatics volumeI Part I is perhaps the clearest and best argued attempt in contemporary Dogmatics to escape from the demand that theological statements can be meaningful if, and only if, they can be verified or falsified. I fully realise that Barth's attitudes to the relation between reason and faith, and historical criticism and faith, change considerably in the later volumes of Church Dogmatics. I am thus attempting to assess the epistemological significance of Barth's use of the doctrine of justification by faith in his early theology. I am not attempting a complete or systematic exposition of Barth's whole theology.

Karl Barth's attempt to evade the damands of the falsification principle, is not the only type of Fiedism. His position may be called 'Right-wing fideism' because it attempts to deny the necessity for any type of falsification of religious statements, whilst retaining the revelation of God in Christ Jesus as the sole norm of faith.

Several contemporary British analytical philosophers share with Barth the desire to evade the challenge of the falsification principle in religious language, but differ from him in so far as they have no desire to restate the Christian faith in Neo-Orthodox terms. This type of Fideism may be called 'Left-wing' in that it often recommends a radical alteration of what has traditionally been thought to be the fact claiming content of the Christian faith.

Firstly, left-wing fideism is non-cognitivist in character. This means that those defending the position claim that religious statements are of a logically different type, and have no direct logical relations with any sort of fact claiming or descriptive statements. Indeed, religious statements are not really statements at all, but are assertions, or prescriptions:

whatever the function of religious language may be, it does not describe what is the case in any sense.

The second feature of left-wing fideism is that it is reductionist in character. The moves towards non-cognitivism and reductionism are closely related: The languages of the New Testament, of the Creeds, of the Early Church Fathers, and of much Liturgy and Prayer, although they contain diverse non-cognitive elements, seem at first sight to presuppose cognitive claims about the nature of God and the person of Christ. It is hardly surprising that when the prima facie fact claiming statements of theological discourse have to be eliminated because of the left-wing fideist programme, some form of reductionism almost inevitably ensues. Such statements as 'I believe in God the Father almighty maker of heaven and earth', have to be reduced to statements like, 'I commit myself to an agapeistic way of life, and I can love my neighbour better here and how, if I think about the story of the world's creation by God'.

A common feature of such reduction programmes is that they tend to be selective: Braithwaite[10] chooses for his philosophical analysis only those Christian claims which can easily be reduced to moral assertions, or stories which illustrate a faithful commitment to a moral programme. Braithwaite's lecture ignores not only modern forms of worship and prayer in the Christian Churches, but most of the prima facie fact claiming statements made in the New Testament; e.g. "Believe me, that I am in the Father and the Father in me"[11] Similarly, one looks in vain for any discussion in this lecture of the doctrine of the homoousion, or the doctrine of the Trinity.

In Chapter Three, I will discuss in detail the problems involved in the left-wing fideist account of the nature of religious assertions. I will restrict my discussion to D.Z. Phillips' book, The Concept of Prayer This is because Phillips illustrates clearly the two main features of left-wing

10. In his famous lecture on An Empiricist View of the Nature of Religious Belief

11. John 14:11 R.S.V.

fideism; its non-cognitive character, and its reductionist programme.[3] But further than this, Phillips attempts what few non-cognitive philosophical theologians have so far attempted: he tries to analyse in detail one of the most important components of Christian life and worship: that of Prayer.

CHAPTER TWO

RIGHT - WING FIDEISM

1. Barth's Rejection of 'Natural Theology'

Barth saw for the first time in his second edition of his commentary on Romans, the danger, only too clearly manifest in the Liberal Protestant theology of the Nineteenth Century, of theology being reduced to anthropology. The Liberal Protestants were only too ready to regard the Word of God as a sub-species of the word of man, as the word of man spoken loudly. The Word of God was viewed as something that must be tamed to express the respectable moral and social code of the present age.

Barth's study of Anselm led him to realise that his Christliche Dogmatik im Entwurf[1] was subject to the very criticism which he had applied to Liberal Protestant theology: the arguments of the Christliche Dogmatik were so embedded in existentialist philosophy, in particular that of Kierkegaard, that the word of man had become a presupposition for the understanding of the Word of God. Barth's study of Anselm[2] shows Barth's determination to break off his theology completely from every form of philosophy. God is not a being among beings; a someone or something which can be manipulated and operated on by a two valued logic, or by any human set of categories no matter how subtle, or all comprehensive. "God exists, if he does exist - in a unique manner that befits him as the only one who ultimately really exists."[3]

Statements about God and about the world are both logically and materially of a totally different type from one another. There is neither some psychological point of contact between God and man, such as the image of God in man, nor any logical similarity of form between God's speaking and man's speaking. Any material and/or logical relations which may once have existed between God and man were annihilated by the fall. "There is nothing in the

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1. I Die Lehre vom Worte Gottes: München 1927

2. And also his lecture 'Schicksal und Idee in der Theologie', cf.; Theologische Fragen und Antworten, Gesammelte Vorträge 3, Zurich 1957

3. Anselm: Fides quaerens intellectum, p.98

world which is *simile* to human reason, as such and *per se*, which is necessary to it and which quite independently of anything outside of itself, is also a medium for knowledge of God. That there should be such media requires the existence of the Church, revelation and faith. Insofar as man is viewed in himself and apart from the Church, God is in fact an object which he neither knows directly nor indirectly."[4]

Therefore Barth concludes that knowledge or awareness of God does not occur by means of any material or human medium. Man is addressed by God as He is in himself: God in pure act. "The object of the enquiry stands over against him who enquires not as 'it', not even as 'he', but as 'thou' as the unmediated 'thou' of the Lord."[5]

Barth's attack on the attempt to pass from anthropology to theology, to infer knowledge of God from knowledge of man, is not restricted to his attack on Liberal Protestantism. He also attacks the claim of traditional Roman theology that because of some similarity of being between God and man, man's knowledge of himself and of his world, provides an analogy, a clue as to what God's being is like. For example, Aquinas' doctrines of the analogy of attribution, and the analogy of proper proportionality, although presenting an object of belief which is precariously poised between agnosticism and anthropomorphism, does assert that man can get to a knowledge of God, by taking a careful look at himself and at the world. In *Church Dogmatics* I, pt. I, Barth clearly rejects any such attempt to crib, cabin and confine God by the norms or standards of a philosophy, whether this be Thomism or existentialism. Such an enterprise is the setting up of an idol other than God as the true object of worship. The doctrine of the *analogia entis* is for Barth the paradigm of the anti-Christ, from which all scientific theology must be cleansed. "If theology allows itself to be called, or calls itself a science, it cannot at the same time take over the obligation to submit to

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4. *Anselm: Fides:* p.117

5. *Anselm: Fides:* p.151

measurement by canons valid for other sciences."[6]

Barth's univocal rejection of natural theology is pin-pointed in his debate with Brunner.[7] Brunner claims that Barth presents a conceptual rejection of natural theology, in rather the same way that a rigidly behaviourist psychologist might reject the claims of a Freudian depth psychologist: he regards Barth's views on natural theology as a straightforward negation of the major assertions common to most natural theologians. Barth, says Brunner, rejects all logical and material relations between God and the world: God can be known only through his grace manifested in Christ Jesus. This implies that God's image in man was eradicated totally by the fall, and as a result, creation and revelation are cut asunder. No ordinances of preservation such as the necessity of state rules about marriage can be seen in creation. There is no point of contact,[8] between God and man outside God in Christ. The new creation is not an addition to, or perfection of the old, but its destruction, and replacement by something new.

Brunner then affirms all the propositions which he says Barth denies. He distinguishes the formal imago dei in man, which he claims is not destroyed by the fall, and the material imago dei in man, which the fall annihilates. The formal image of God is man's humanity, and therefore his responsibility before God: man as a matter of fact sins, but his ability to regognise himself as a sinner, presupposes his formal awareness of what he has fallen from, the God to whom he is responsible, even during his life in sin. This formal imago dei is the imprint which God has left on creation, and it facilitates man's recognition of divine ordinances, such as matrinony and the state. It also enables man to understand God's address in Christ Jesus. Brunner concludes: "In the long run, the Church can bear the rejection of theologia naturalis, as little as its misuse. It is the task of our theological

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6. Church Dogmatics I, pt. I., p.9

7. Eng. trans. 'Nature and Grace' by Brunner; and the reply, 'No' by Barth. trans. Peter Fraenkel; Geoffrey Bles. 1946

8. Anknüpfungspunkt

generation to find the way back to a true theologia naturalis."[9]

Barth's 'Nein' to Brunner is one of anger. Brunner's formal imago dei is not, Barth writes, purely formal. It is true that man even as a sinner is responsible before God: but to go on from this formal statement to suggest that God can be known by man through man's own efforts, if he takes a good look at the world, is a denial of the justification sola fide. Creation is the work of God's grace through Jesus Christ, and can only be seen aright by those who already have faith in him. There are not two graces, one inferred from creation, the other given in Christ: there is no two storey building with analogia entis at the bottom, and analogia fidei built on at the top. If we are justified at all, we are justified through faith in Christ alone. "Do believers sit in the councils of God?..... On the basis of instinct and reason one may proclaim one thing to be an 'ordinance of creation', another, another thing, ... according to the liberal, conservative, or revolutionary inclinations of each. Can such a claim be anything other than the rebellious establishment of some very private Weltanschauung as a kind of Papacy."[10]

Brunner's denial of the historicity of the Virgin Birth, is Barth suggests, a symptom of his denial of the Sola Fide: it is the denial that God is solely responsible for the salvation of man through the incarnation. Luke 1:35 is for Barth the norm of a grace centred theology. "And the Angel said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the most high will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the son of God'."[11]

2. Jesus Christ is the sole source of our knowledge of God:

The difficulty in writing about Barth's theology is that everything of importance has to be fitted under the heading, Jesus Christ. Barth does not say that the statements of natural theology are false.... this would be to play

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9. Natural Theology, p.59
10. Natural Theology, pp. 86-87
11. R.S.V. Text.

a kind of negative natural theology..... but rather Jesus Christ is the sole medium through which we have knowledge of God. All meaningful statements about God are reducible to statements about God's actuality in Christ Jesus. God is not a being at the apex of some abstract human metaphysical system: He is insofar as He acts, and His acts are the revelation of His Word through Jesus Christ.

How, exactly is God revealed in Jesus Christ? God reveals Himself to man when, where and how, He freely chooses to do so. God cannot be constrained or manipulated by man to provide his gracious revelation, when man feels he would like to have it. God's act of revelation cannot be pinpointed by any human experiment. "Real proclamation thus means God's Word preached, and God's Word preached means man's language about God on the basis of God's self-objectification which is neither present nor predictable, nor relatable to any design, but is real solely in the freedom of his grace, in virtue of which from time to time, he wills to be the object of this language."[12]

God is thus not identical with any feature of the world through which He reveals Himself: rather He has the freedom to display Himself when and where He chooses. This means that the Word of God is never frozen, or certainly present in anyone, or anything in the world. The scriptures cannot be identified with the Word of God; they record past encounters of man with God's Word, particularly with God's Word in Jesus Christ. God may reveal Himself if He wishes to, in and through the words of the Bible, but the Bible by itself, and independently of the action of God's grace cannot be the Word of God. God may as a matter of fact choose to speak his Word at the same time and place in which the words of the Bible are proclaimed, but He doesn't have to. "Revelation itself is nothing else than the freedom of God's grace."[13]

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12. Church Dogmatics I, pt.I., pp. 102-103

13. Church Dogmatics, I, pt. I., p.132

Barth's concentration on God being nothing over and above his acts, and God's action being the result of His freedom to act in any way He chooses, leads to an ambiguous view about the importance of the historical claims made for Christ in the New Testament. On the one hand, Barth wants to say that God's revelation is both a veiling and an unveiling: even in Jesus Christ God's communication with man is indirect, in the sense that Jesus of Nazareth cannot be seen to be the Son of God by mere inspection of his body and actions. Thus Barth tends to regard the Bible as consisting of 'Sagas', which may or may not be historically true, and which contain the Word of God, only when God wills them to do so. On the other hand, Barth underlines the importance, if the doctrine of Justification Sola fide is to be taken seriously, of belief in the actual historical occurrence of the Virgin Birth, and the empty tomb. There is a conflict here between Barth's wish to stress the Word of God as something completely in God's control, and the actuality of the incarnation, in which God allows Himself in Jesus Christ to be at least, in part, under the control of man. This ambiguity results from Barth's belief in the "infinite qualitative distinction between time and eternity, alike in its negative and positive meaning; God in heaven, you on earth."[14] God and man are totally different: to preserve God's transcendence over against man, his quality of being "wholly other", Barth must stress the radical discontinuity between anything that God is and anything that man is: but, if this discontinuity is pressed to extremes, it leads to a denial that the Word of God was ever incarnate in the world at all. Barth at this point seems to place a greater emphasis on Christ's unity with the Father, than on his being 'very man'.

God's logical and material difference from every other object in the world makes it necessary for any attempt at theology which is to be scientific, to be determined by the object of which it claims to be a

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14. Barth: Epistle to the Romans: Preface, English Trans. Hoskyns, p.10

science, and not by the standards and norms of any other science. God is the subject of theology, a being who cannot be used or operated on, in the way that ordinary objects in the world can be operated on. "The subject of revelation is the subject which remains indissoluble subject. We cannot get behind this subject. It cannot become an object."[15]

God is never referredtto as an object in the ordinary sense of the word. In Church Dogmatics, Barth uses the word "Gegenstand" rather than the word "objekt". "Gegenstand" suggests something or someone which stands over against something or somebody. "Objekt" is used to designate something that can come under critical, but passive investigation: in this case the knowledge relation is one of activity on the part of the subject, and passivity on the part of the object. "Gegenstand" is a word which indicates that God's reality to man is one of encounter, in which God has come down into man's area of sin, and stands over against him as his commander. God is therefore not revealed directly, but indirectly, under the cover of ordinary objects, which are different from God himself.

Barth is thus claiming that the sole norm of theology is the God whom we know in his revelation through Christ Jesus. Thus no philosophical or metaphysical preamble to faith is of any use. No inference can get from man's words to God's Word, from man's being to God's being, from man's acts to God's acts. To attempt any such inference is to judge God by standards alien to his nature, to treat him as though He were "Objekt", rather than "Gegenstand". Natural theology deals with abstract possibilities about what God may be like, and how his revelation in Jesus may be possible. But, for Barth, God's revelation in Christ is not an abstract possibility, but an actuality, and in face of such actuality all speculative possibilities must cease. "All universal concepts suppress the essential feature that the Word of God is a reality only by its own decision. That the Word of God is a decision means that there is no concept of the Word of God except

15. Church Dogmatics I, pt. I., p.438

the name of God, which we love, fear, and adore, because it is identical with the Bearer of the name."[16]

God speaks his Word through Jesus Christ in a pure act. Barth seems at times to reduce Christ's revelation in the world to the acts of Christs speaking to a series of individuals. No universal notion can embrace or describe God's activity. A man either receives God's gracious Word, or he doesn't. "Neither precedence of an anthropological possibility, nor the subsequence of a reality in the Church can be considered as the point from which to contemplate and to understand the path to dogmatic knowledge, but solely the present instant in which Jesus Christ Himself speaks and is heard, when the light divine is created in our hearts."[17] This revelation of God in Jesus Christ is the sole criterion of dogmatics and of the proclamation of the Church. Jesus Christ is the "essence", of the Church. When Christ sanctifies the being of man into the being of the Church, He makes their language of proclamation into God's Word. The Church does not have the sole possession of God's Word: it is not an institution that has the right to control God's Word, in the way, for example, that the Convocations have the right to control the Church of England. God's Word is not just another piece of Church property: any actual Church institution can as a matter of empirical fact reject God's revelation in Jesus Christ as their norm, and by this cease to be a medium through which God can reveal his Word.

Barth's concentration on the actuality of God, leads to another point of tension within his theology. Because Christ is the concrete universal, the Word of God as pure actuality, Barth at times says that God is nothing over and above the particular acts in which he reveals His Word to any particular individual. God is God for me, only insofar as I acknowledge that God in His freedom has made the words of man preached to me to become His Word. Once the actuality of the atomic act of God's revelation is

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16. Church Dogmatics I, pt.I p.181
17. Church Dogmatics I, pt.I pp.44-45

past, nothing remains behind in the material or events in which God reveals Himself. The events cannot in any sense be divine until the next atomic act of God's revelation. No material in the world can be a medium for, or mediate, God's revelation. The Words of the Bible are not the Word of God and have no logical connexion with the Word of God, except when God chooses to make them his Word. For example, even if it is the case that the Passion narratives in the synoptic gospels do describe accurately the events in which Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, these descriptions by themselves do not tell us anything about God. The narratives can only tell us something about God, if and when God freely decides to make the words of the narratives His Word. "If we wish really to regard the revelation from the side of its subject, God, then we must understand that this subject, God, the Revealer, is identical with his act in revelation, identical also with its effect."[18]

But, how do I know when God is revealing His Word to me? Barth says that I know this only by God's grace. To claim to know God's revelation by any other criterion than by the fact that it is God who through His grace is revealing Himself to me, is to deny the concrete actuality of God's revelation, to attempt to know God by my own works and not by God's grace. "The reality of the Word of God in all its three forms is based only upon itself. So, too, knowledge of it by men can consist only in acknowledgment of it."[19]

All knowledge of God depends on His revelation; as a result of this, the seemingly human terms we use of God such as 'Father', 'Son', and 'speaks', depend for their meaning not on the use these terms have in ordinary language, but the use they have in their description of God. Thus for Barth, the primary use of these symbols, is not that they literally describe human situations and states of affairs, and are then applied by

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18. Church Dogmatics I, pt.I p.340

19. Church Dogmatics I, pt.I p.233

analogy to God: rather they apply primarily to God, and from thence are used symbolically of human situations and states of affairs. This is the analogia fidei which is one of the concepts Barth uses to replace the Roman Analogia entis.

Despite his concentration on the events of God's present revelation of His Word in Jesus Christ, Barth also regards God's saving acts in Jesus Christ, not as something that occurs merely here and now, or even only in this historical life and death of Jesus Christ, but it is something God through Christ planned from eternity. In the relationship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the Trinity, God planned the salvation of the world through His Son. The relationship within the Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit is not a relation known by analogy with human relationships, but is the paradigm of all human relationships. This is the analogia relationis, which is another aspect of the analogia fidei: the two notions together are Barth's alternative to the analogia entis. For Barth, the ordo essendi and the ordo cognoscendi, are one and the same, and both start with God's saving act in Jesus Christ. In the Roman doctrine of the analogia entis, in the ordo essendi, God is the prime analogue, and He as Creator is causally responsible for the meaning which the descriptions we use of aspects of the world have. Because God created the world, our love is an imitation and a participation in his love, our wisdom an imitation and a participation in His wisdom. Man cannot however see himself from God's point of view, and the ordo cognoscendi, man's love and man's wisdom have to be used as the primary analogue of God's love and God's wisdom, if we are to have any knowledge of God at all. Barth refuses to allow this separation of the order of knowing from the order of being: God is not what man's symbols may possibly attribute to him. God's actions are the models of which all human actions are themselves only symbols. "God alone as He whom He is by Himself, i.e. as the

eternal Father of the eternal Son, is properly and adequately to be called Father."[20]

Barth's theology is thus univocally Christocentric: all knowledge of God and all genuine religious actions can be acquired or performed only in God's grace through Jesus Christ. There are no short cuts to God by means of human reason or religious experience: Christ alone is the norm and criterion by whom everything and everyone in the world is to be judged if it is to be seen aright. "There is a way from Christology to anthropology; there is no way from anthropology to Christology."[21]

3. Barth and Logical Positivism:

Natural theology has been called 'The sick man of Europe',[22] but this sickness unto death is not solely the result of the positivist assertion of the impossibility of metaphysics. Barth's theology is both a sort of positivist theology, and is also an answer to the logical positivist charge, that theological statements are meaningless because they are not verifiable by sense experience. Both forms of Positivism display similar logical and epistemological stresses and strains.

Both Barth and the logical Positivists are obsessed by the problems of epistemology. The Positivist claims that a statement is meaningful if it is reducible without loss of meaning to a protocol, or basic statement, which is a direct description of what I perceive. Barth says that meaningful theological statements are reducible without loss of meaning to basic or protocol statements verifiable by my experience of God's gracious revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ. Any statement which is not reducible to a protocol statement about God's revelation in Christ Jesus is meaningless rather than false. Barth and the Positivists share a

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20. Church Dogmatics I, pt. I. p.451

21. Church Dogmatics I, pt. I. p.148

22. Ninian Smart in Prospect for Metaphysics ed. I.T. Ramsey, p.80

similar attitude towards metaphysics. Idealist philosophy is not the contradictory of logical positivism, in the sense that if the statements of the logical positivists happened to be false, the statements of the Idealist might be true: Idealism is rather meaningless because the statements of which any such system may be composed cannot be reduced to protocol statements and verified by sense experience. Similarly, natural theology and Barthian theology are not two theologies, the statements of which formally contradict the one the other. (Only Brunner and Bland Blanshard are naive enough to think this). Rather, Barth argues, the generalities of natural theology are meaningless conceptual constructs, which cannot be reduced to protocol statements about God's revelation in His Son, and are, as a consequence, meaningless. "By natural theology, I mean every (positive and negative) formulation of a system which claims to be theology; i.e. to interpret divine revelation whose subject differs fundamentally from the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, and whose method, therefore differs equally from the exposition of Holy Scripture. Such a system is contained not only in Brunner's counter theses, but also in the theses ascribed to me..... For they represent even though negatively, an abstract speculation concerning a something that is not identical with the revelation of God in Jesus Christ."[23] This passage is the Theological equivalent of Russell's injunction, "wherever possible logical constructions are tonbe substituted for inferred entities."[24]

Barth is thus a theological phenomenalist: just as for the phenomenalist statements about the being of objects are translatable without loss of meaning into statements about the appearances of objects, so for Barth, statements about the being of God are translatable without loss of meaning into statements about the acts of God. "All we can know of God according to the scripture testimony is His acts."[25] I think it is more appropriate to call Barth's

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23. Natural Theology, pp. 74-75

24. Mysticism and Logic. Penguin ed. p.148

25. Church Dogmatics I, pt.I. p.426

theology phenomenalist rather than analyse it in occasionalist terms.[26] There seem to be points at which the occasionalist comparison does not fit. For example, according to the occasionalism of Malebranche, God is the only real cause of anything; so, on the occasion of my willing X, God causes my body to act in accordance with my will; on the occasion of my body having certain sensations, God causes my mind to have the corresponding ideas.

But, in what sense can Barth be called an Occasionalist? In a sense, the presence of God's revelation is the occasion of man receiving grace. It is unclear however, what the analogue is in Barth for the mind-body problem. Further there is no permanent metaphysical God in Barth who can be the occasional cause of revelation. For God is made identical with His action: therefore we can know nothing about Him over and above His action.

There is a similarity between the conventionalist theory of necessary truth, and God as the giver of Gracious truth in His revelation through Jesus Christ. For Ayer, the basic laws of logic are not so much true as prescriptions for the use of language: p v -p and -(p.-p) are 'true' because this is the accepted usage by all people who use, say European language forms. Likewise for Barth, God is not subject to necessary and unalterable laws of formal logic such as p v -p, and -(p.-p)? He, as it were, gives any meaning His revelation may have by His act of grace in revealing Himself in His Word. Any logical consistency God's acts of revelation may have, are logical consistencies He has imposed by His own free acts. What is for a Positivist a human Conventionalist theory of necessary truth, is for Barth, a divine conventionalist theory of necessary truth.

Logical Positivism and Barthian Theology are faced by similar logical difficulties.

Firstly, if the meaning of a statement is dependent on its being translatable into statements about God's revelation in Jesus Christ, how do I know that this central statement is meaningful? To say that it is meaning-

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26. Cf. Jerome Hamer: L'occasionalisme theologique de Karl Barth: étude sur sa methode dogmatique.

ful because God through Jesus Christ graciously enables us to know that it is, is to argue in a circle. Many different philosophical systems exhort us to adopt absolute presuppositions which are equally as all embracing as this statement. Why believe that all meaningful statements are reducible to statements about God's self revelation in Jesus Christ rather than His revelation in Buddha, or Karl Marx?

Secondly, Barth, as did the positivists, seems to get tied up with the problem of solipsism. If all statements are reducible to protocol statements about my own experiences, then I cannot have knowledge of anything which is outside myself. The problem occurs in Barth's theology more subtly, but nonetheless really. I can know God only because God's grace through Jesus Christ causes me to have knowledge of God. Does this mean that I have knowledge of God, or that God knows Himself through me? Is there a use of 'to know' in which I remain totally passive as the knowing agent, and the object of knowledge causes itself to become known? I think Barth can get out of my charge here, if He is willing, as doubtlessly he would have been, to say there is a use of the verb 'to know', which is appropriate to God only, and which differs from all other types of knowing: this is the sense in which what is known is causally responsible for bringing the act of knowing in the knowing agent. This move can only be taken, if the phrase 'to know' is said to be used in the case of God in a way which bears no relation ot its use in the phrase 'I know I am reading from a typewritten page'. Barth takes this move: it is hard to see how any meaning can be attached to his use of 'to know'.

Even if I let Barth escape with his eccentric use of the verb 'to know' I think he gets caught up in solipsism at another point. If God's revelation is episodic, as Barth claims, and no act of His revelation is either logically or causally related to any other act, then believers seem to be totally isolated from each other in their knowledge of God. I can

know God, when He speaks to me in His Word; you can know God when He speaks to you in His Word and the light divine is kindled in your heart. But I cannot know when God reveals Himself to you, and you cannot know when God reveals Himself to me: unless of course God is courteous enough to tell me in a revelation that He is now revealing Himself to you. It is hard to see how for Barth, believers can communicate about their episodic knowings of God.

Thirdly, Barth is propounding a theological atomism analogous to Wittgenstein's logical atomism in the Tractatus. For Wittgenstein, the world consists of a series of atomic facts which are logically unrelated to each other, and so are contingent. Likewise for Barth, the Word of God is revealed to man as a series of atomic acts of self revelation through Jesus Christ. These acts of God are logically unrelated, in that I cannot infer or predict from an experience of the Word of God revealed now, any future features of aspects of God's self revelation. The logical atomist rejects the coherence theory of truth on the ground that the world just does not consist of a series of internally related statements, which can only be known to be unambiguously true when every statement about the world has been examined, and the necessary connexions between these statements made clear. The world consists of logical atoms describable by atomic statements, none of which are internally related, one to the other. Barth similarly rejects the idealist coherence theory of truth, and the doctrine of internal relations. God is just not the sort of being whose acts entail each other, who can only be understood fully, when everything is known about Him. The reality of God is the particular contingent acts of His revelation.

But, if the acts of God in Jesus Christ are concrete particulars, can they be described or understood, or known in any ordinary sense of these words at all? Likewise, if the world consists of atomic facts, in

isolation, where does our use of general statements come from? How is it possible to make general statements of the form 'all A are B', rather than only the particular 'X here and now'? In his 'Lectures on the philosophy of logical atomism' Russell invented the notion of 'general facts' in an attempt to explain our use of general statements, but this notion fitted ill into a system where all statements were supposed to be reducible to statements about particular atomic facts. In the same way, Wittgenstein in the Tractatus, is uncertain whether the objects (gegenstand) out of which atomic facts are made are individuals or universals. Max Black writes: "It would certainly be a mistake to identify objects with what we commonly call 'individuals', or to suppose that they cannot be at all like what we commonly call 'relations'. Since objects constitute the substance of the world, it is natural to think of them as timeless (cf. 2.027), and so to imagine them as resembling 'universals' rather than 'particulars', but both of these traditional terms are inappropriate. All we can really know about these objects is that they exist."[27] Although 'gegenstand' is the most common word for object in German, I don't think it is coincidental that both Wittgenstein and Barth use this term. In Barth's case, God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ, is neither particular nor universal, and thus seems to share a similarity in logical status to Wittgenstein's 'objects'.

Barth restored transcendence to theology in a way similar to that in which the logical atomists restored transcendence to philosophy. The atomic facts of the atomists are something over against the percipient; all meaningful statements are reducible to statements about atomic facts; and an atomic proposition is true or false, insofar as its elements correspond to or picture the atomic fact it describes. In contrast to this the Nineteenth Century British Idealists had tended towards a form of immanantism according to which truth depended on a statement's cohering with a whole body

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27. A Companion to Wittgenstein's Tractatus, p.57

of statements, rather than its corresponding with what is real. Barth restored the notion of transcendence in theology by insisting on the realism and actuality of God over against man. God is known when he makes Himself known, and is not reducible to some human notion, such as man's sense of absolute dependence. God is never God because man's thinking makes Him so, but only because God's gracious acts make it so. I pointed out in the last paragraph that both Barth and Wittgenstein use the German word "gegenstand" to refer to a certain sort of object. In both authors, this word is used to refer to something or someone which stands over against somebody, rather than something which can be passively manipulated and used for experiment.

Barth's theological phenomenalism runs into similar difficulties to those which trouble ordinary phenomenalism. If statements about God are reducible to statements about God's acts of revelation in Jesus Christ, then Barth's writings should display nothing of God's operations over and above God's acts here and now. But Church Dogmatics I, pt. I, does contain elements not compatible with this phenomenalist programme. For example, Barth's analysis of the doctrine of the Trinity does contain a concept which prima facie is not deducible from the acts of God in his revelation. Further, if the record of the life of Christ is the Word of God only when God chooses to make it so, then the Virgin Birth, and the empty tomb, which Barth claims are implied by the doctrine of Justification Sola Fide, are elements in the Dogmatics which are not reducible to acts of God's revelation through Christ Jesus in the present.

Natural theology may, at present be in its death throes, but it is due to the initiative of theologians, as much as of philosophers, which has brought about the sickness. In this, Barth, despite his claims to distil the Word of God pure, is very much an example of twentieth century thought and culture.[28]

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28. For another but shorter relation of the early Barth to the logical positivists see N.H.G. Robinson "Karl Barth's Empiricism" Hibbert Journal 1950-51 Vol. 49

4. The Logic of Christ

The confrontation between the verification principle, and the doctrine of justification by faith only raises more sharply the traditional questions of how theology is related to philosophy, of how grace is related to reason.

(a) What is Barth rejecting when he rejects natural theology?

Traditionally the relation of philosophy to theology has tended to fall into one of two categories: it has been revisionary or descriptive.

Philosophy fulfils a revisionary role in relation to theology when it seeks not only to lay bare and clarify the content of God's revelation, but also to change some of the features of the supposed revelation in the interests of a particular philosophical theory. The method employed in Hegel's Lectures on the philosophy of religion is a good example of a philosophical method attempting to revise the content of revelation. The eschatological elements of traditional Christianity are, Hegel suggests, made irrelevant by the philosophical core of Christianity, which is the identity of God and man. Knowledge of scientific fact, and knowledge of religious truth are logically totally unrelated to each other: religious truth is inseparable from the consciousness of truth. There for God to be 'incarnate of the Virgin Mary by the Holy Ghost', is for man to be conscious of him as so incarnate. For Hegel, the truth-conditions of Christianity are all resident in the consciousness of the believers and the Church. No scientific hypothesis, or historical enquiry has any logical relation with religious belief, and is incapable of providing any verification or falsification for it.

This is the intellectual tradition against which Barth reacted: revelation has no authority or norm of its own; human reason is the sole judge of what is true or false, relevant or irrelevant in religious or secular beliefs. Thus for Hegel, "Philosophy unfolds only itself when it unfolds religion; and when it unfolds itself it unfolds religion."[29]

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29. Quoted: F. Copleston, A History of Philosophy, Vol. VII., p.239

The Liberal Protestant tradition from Schleiermacher to Bultmann and beyond took over this notion that special revelation is something which man come of age can supercede and dismiss. Barth's humerous passage about Schleiermacher is true of the whole movement. "As an apologist of Christianity, Schleiermacher really played up on it as a virtuoso plays up on his fiddle: he played the notes and airs which, if they did not cause his hearers to rejoice, could at least be acceptable to them. Schleiermacher did not speak as a responsible servant of Christianity, but, like a true virtuoso, as a free master of it."[30]

Philosophy fulfils a descriptive role in relation to theology when it sees its function as laying bare the metaphysical conditions within which an autonomous theology is possible. Some modern interpreters of Aquinas argue that he is a descriptive metaphysician in this sense. If this claim is correct, Barth is certainly mistaken to lump together, as if they were one qualitatively identical entity, Nineteenth century liberal protestant theology, and the analogia entis of the Roman Catholic theology.

The intellectual background of this aspect of Roman theology is hardly that of Hegel, but rather that of Plato, Aristotle and Augustine. Aquinas does not seem to eliminate special revelation, or to reduce it to general revelation: the knowledge of the world and of God, logically cannot according to Aquinas, conflict with what we know of God through special revelation. If knowledge of God acquired through special revelation, and knowledge of God gained by human reason appear to conflict, this is the result of a misunderstanding on man's part, either of God's revelation, or of His creation. God is causally responsible for general revelation because He is the Creator, and for special revelation because of His action in Jesus Christ: He cannot contradict Himself.

For Barth, on the other hand, statements about the world cannot

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30. Barth: From Rousseau to Ritschl: Eng. trans. of Die Protestantische Theologie im 19 Jahrhundert, S.C.M. 1959, p.327

contradict statements about God's revelation in Jesus Christ, because there are and can be no logical relation between the two sets of statements. Any apparent contradiction is the result of man's making an idol out of his own philosophy.

Is Aquinas, as the Barth of Church Dogmatics I, pt.I. claims, a liberal Protestant before his time? Does Aquinas by his use of the five ways and the analogia entis attempt to produce faith in revelation solely by the use of human philosophical reasoning techniques? Does he try to reason from the abstract possibility of God's existence to the concrete actuality of God in Christ?

Aquinas is popularly pictured as a philosopher who attempts to prove the existence of God by use of philosophical arguments. A.G.N. Flew claims: "Many of the greatest philosophers - Aquinas, Descartes, Leibnitz and BerKeley among them - have presented what they considered to be proofs."[31] But this is a distorted and inaccurate view of what Aquinas is doing. His starting point is always faith and revelation and not human philosophy.

Firstly, Aquinas is keen to stress the transcendence of God. God is not one being among other beings in the world: He cannot be caught in philosophical conceptual nets. Thus: "All our intellect conceives of God fails to represent Him. Also that which God is in Himself always remains hidden from us, and the highest knowledge we can have of Him in this life, is to know that He is above everything that we can conceive about Him."[32]

Secondly, he very definitely makes philosophy the handmaid of theology and not vice versa: the starting point for all theology is the revelation given by God. "So sacred scripture, which has no superior science over it, disputes the denial of its principles; it argues on the basis of those truths held by revelation which an opponent admits, as when debating with

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31. God and Philosophy: p.12

32. De Veritate q.2.a.9.

debating with heretics it appeals to received authoritative texts of Christian theology, and uses one article against those who reject another."[33]

Thirdly, in the same section of the Summa, the arguments of philosophy are said to provide notmore than "extraneous arguments from probability."[34]

Philosophy can by analysis of theological concepts, help to clarify God's revelation to man, it cannot in the nature of the case become a substitute for God's grace. Reason can clarify and rebut the difficulties unbelievers may bring against faith in God's revelation: but it can never replace revelation. If an opponent believes that God's so called revelation is no revelation, philosophical argument cannot bring about a conversion. For, "Our faith rests on the revelation made to the prophets and apostles, who wrote the canonical books, not on revelation, if such there be, made to any other teacher."[35]

Barth half sees what Aquinas' method really is - but half doesn't see. In "Schicksal und Idee in Der Theologie",[36] Barth quotes with approval Aquinas' insistence in the Summa Theologica that God is the object of theology only insofar as He is identical with the subject. For, "All things are dealt with in Holy Teaching in terms of God, either because they are God Himself, or because they are relative to Him as their origin and end."[37]

Both the "Five ways" and the analogia entis occur within the framework of a grace centred theology. The "Five ways" do not produce, independently of faith, God Himself: they tell us only "What men call God". These arguments are not intended to be a substitute for God's revelation, but rather lead, as Victor White points out from a negative to a positive agnosticism.....from saying, 'I do not know' to saying 'there is an unknown'.[38]

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33. Summa Theologica: Ia I 8; New Dominican Translation, Vol. I, p.31
34. Ibid: p.31
35. Op. Cit. I I 8; pp.31-33
36. In Theologishe Fragen und Antworten:Gesammalte Vortrage f 3.Zurich 1957 pp.57-58
37. Summa Theologica I I 7; Op.cit. p.27
38. Cf. Victor White: God the Unknown, passim

Similarly, the doctrine of the analogia entis does not make God into a Being of the same type as beings in the world. The doctrine of the analogia entis does not use language to describe God metaphorically. A metaphor, such as the "road is a ribbon of moonlight" is used literally, in the sense that to qualify the metaphor kills its effectiveness. To say "the road is a ribbon of moonlight - but not quite" is to say nothing. Analogy rather, starts with God. In saying God is good, we are not making God into the same sort of thing as a good man, but are rather trying to make clearer the normal meaning of the word 'good'; that is the meaning it has when it is attributed to God, and by analogy with whom we apply it to persons in the world.

Aquinas method does not seem to be far removed from Barth's. With Barth, Aquinas can say: "But it is God's miracle, when that happens, neither nature, nor the art of the theologian, but grace which one cannot count upon, which one cannot seize for oneself, which one can only receive."[39]

(b) Descriptive Metaphysics as a necessary condition of religious knowledge:

I think that Barth is partly right and partly wrong in giving a purely descriptive function to philosophical theology. In demanding the complete autonomy of theology, Barth in the end seems to deny any autonomy to philosophy and so to any human thought or reflection.

I believe that some type of descriptive metaphysics is a necessary condition of any understanding, or knowledge, or personal relationship, in any meaningful use of these terms. To say that both the material and logical divides between God and man are so great that we cannot know, or understand, or have a personal relationship with God in any ordinary sense of these words, is surely in the end saying that we just don't have knowledge, or understanding, or personal relationships with God.

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39. "Schicksal und Idee in Der Theologie" Op. cit. p.58. Translated with the assistance of Mrs. Susan Mole. The German original is as follows: "Aber es is Wunder Gottes, wenn das geschieht, weder Natur nech kunst des Theologen sondern, Gnade, mit der man nicht rechnen, die man sich nicht nehmen, die man nur empfaggen Kann"

But what sort of revisionary metaphysics am I claiming is a necessary presupposition of our understanding of God's revelation? P.T. Geach, in a Symposium entitled "On what there is"[40], pin-points the issues I wish to discuss. He writes: "For the conceptual scheme is not a matter of free choice. Certain concepts like existence and truth, and thing and property, are used, and cannot but be used in all rational discourse whatsoever, and ontology is an attempt to scrutinise our use of them." Although I am unhappy about some of Geach's terminology, particularly his use of 'concept' which is a systematically ambiguous expression in epistemology, I wish to argue along his general approach. I regard W.V.O. Quine as wrong when he indicates that he thinks all conceptual schemes are a matter of convention, a matter of which is the easiest way to talk about certain types of entities. Quine says, "Our acceptance of an ontology is ..... similar in principle to our acceptanceof a scientific theory, say a system of physics: we adopt at least insofar as we are reasonably, the simplest conceptual scheme into which the disordered fragments of raw experience can be fitted and arranged."[41] Quine is right in that say physicalist and phenomenalist theories of the nature of reality may be inter-translatable, and the use of one rather than the other may result from a matter of linguistic convenience: but the fact that they are inter-translatable presupposes that a similar logical structure is being used both by the phenomenalist and by the physicalist. If, for example, the phenomenalist used a logical structure based on -(p. -p) and p v -p, and the physicalists used a logical structure such as p. -p and -(p v -p), then the inter-translatability would not be possible.

At the logical level, I think that any form of communication, whether this is communication of the Word of God, or communication between man and man, presupposes the exclusion of some possibilities..... to exclude no

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40. P.A.S. sup. 1951, p.136

41. Quine: From a Logical Point of View: Harper Paperback, p.16

possibilities is to include everything, and therefore to say nothing. p. -p "I am writing this essay, and I am not writing this essay at one and the same time", is a statement which provides us with no cognitive information about what I am doing. Communication is not a necessary feature of life: as a matter of contingent fact, some human beings communicate by means of verbal language, others don't. Human beings speak to each other: pigs, if they ever communicate with each other at all, only squeal. But, if I wish to make a statement having cognitive content, I 'must' exclude some possibilities. For example, if I want to indicate, or refer to the colour pink, I must exclude green, blue, purple, etc.

Dr. F. Waismann[42] points out that many valued logics are possible. I can grade a statement as 0%, 10%, 50%, 66%, 92% or 100% true, rather than just true or false. But any such graded set of truth values rests on and presupposes two valued logic. This is because, within the many valued systems of logic, no statement can be both 10% true and 66% true, or 50% true, and 100% true, at one and the same time. As J.O. Urmson puts it: "We might have a multi-valued logic..... so let us have a generalised law of contradiction. Let us say, 'In an n- valued logic, no propositions may have more than n-1 true values'. ..... without it, the area of reference of the statement is unlimited, and no meaning can be attached to it. .....to do a certain kind of thing, ... I must follow a certain course of procedure. And this is a logical 'must'; it is not like saying that to serve good boiled potatoes you must put salt on them. ..... but the fact that we could not do the communicating without rules, does not seem to me to be just an empirical fact."[43]

It is interesting that Barth, as I pointed out earlier maintains a theological version of the conventionalist theory of necessary truth.

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42. In his papers on "Alternative logics", P.A.S. 1946, and in "Verifiability" Logic and Language. Vol. I p.117 ff.

43. Symposium: "Are necessary truths true by convention"; P.A.S. Sup. 1947 pp.115 and 116

According to Barth, God has complete freedom and cannot be constrained or limited by any human system of thought. God is therefore not bound by any laws of logic: the word of man becomes the Word of God only when, where and how God wills it to do so. There is no reason why ill-formed formulae such as ~~====~~ v pq z. or ( ) (pq) p (.v) should not become the Word of God, if God willed that they should.

Barth seems confused here. It is hard to see what he means in saying that God is absolutely, or completely free. "Truth of revelation is the freely acting God, Himself and quite alone", he writes.[44] The word "freedom", like the word "similar" and the word "have", takes on different meanings in different contexts of its use. I can have a bank balance, have a gramophone record, have a deep prayer life, and have a wife. But "have" does not mean the same thing in these different contexts. I don't have a bank balance in the same way that I have a wife. "Have" does not own a meaning in isolation: it only takes on meaning when I state in what sense I have something. Likewise two things cannot just be "similar": they must be similar in some respect. "Freedom" behaves logically in a like manner to "similar" and "have". Freedom is not a thing which something has: to be free is to be free in respect of something else. Jones can be said to be free in respect of having just divorced his wife. A convict can be free in the sense of having just been released from prison. But what does Barth mean when he says that God is free? God is free without any restrictions logical or material. Barth would probably retreat at this point and say that God's freedom is not human freedom, and is not even remotely like it. But what is this in the end but to say we don't know whether God is free or not free?

Barth's concentration on the utter freedom of God as pure act, leads in the direction of a denial of the incarnation, on which he purports to lay so much stress. If God is absolutely free, and I only know Him

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44. Church Dogmatics I, pt. I., p.16

insofar as I know His gracious revelation through Jesus Christ, then this freedom implies His inability to limit His freedom in order to perform certain tasks. In order to reveal Himself to man at all, God must limit Himself, in the sense of restricting Himself to one particular course of action rather than another. A fortiori, the supreme self limitation of God is the incarnation: surely God in Christ, once he has committed himself to the policy of becoming incarnate to save man, is bound by his own policy, A god who was absolutely free in his actions in the sense of being totally capricious, would be unintelligible. A pre-condition of understanding God's actions at all, is that they are to some extent self-consistent: that they express statements which are not self-contradictory. If God in His revelation was free in the sense that His revelations were totally qualitatively different one from the other, His actions would be unintelligible. God would have the same cognitive significance which Plato attributes to Heraclitus' doctrine of perpetual flux; God would not be identifiable as one thing rather than another.....He could not even be named. "Socrates, since there is nothing constant here either, - the flowing thing does not flow white but changes, so that the very whiteness itself flows and shifts into another colour, in order that the thing may escape the charge of constancy in that respect..... can we ever give it the name of any colour and be sure that we are naming it rightly?"[45] I am suggesting here that if revelation is as 'actual' as Barth asserts, then this actuality, if it is to be at all intelligible presupposes a a similarity of structure between the logical form of God's address to man, and that of man's address to man. This is far from being a restriction on God's freedom; His freedom is not restricted by His inability to do what is logically nonsense. Further this logical structure common to God and man logically could not have been destroyed by the fall. If this

45. Theatetus. p.182 d.

annihilation had occurred, we could never know about it or discuss it, because all means of communication or coherent thought would have been wiped out with it.

Barth also wants to deny any autonomy to philosophy at the material level, despite himself: I say despite himself because his whole theology with its emphasis on the contingency of the Word of God in Jesus Christ presupposes an ontology: it in fact presupposes the logical possibility of the contingency of events. The Word of God revealed through Christ Jesus is not part of a whole series of statements, one of which can be derived from the other, and in which singular statements cannot be understood fully, without knowledge of the whole class of statements to which it is logically related. There are no internal relations between the almost atomic acts of the Word of God, revealed in Christ. The life of Jesus Christ itself is radically contingent in that Christ as the God-man might have been other than he was and might not have existed at all. The logical status of the statement, 'Jesus of Nazareth died on Calvary' is the same as 'John Jones is now writing an essay.' There is no logical contradiction if either of these statements is negated.

This assertion of the radical contingency of certain events itself presupposes a descriptive metaphysic. The logical atomists such as Russell and Wittgenstein, thought that they were doing metaphysics, but doing it better than the Nineteenth Century British Idealists. The atomists regarded the world as consisting of atomic facts, which were externally but never internally related. Likewise Barth is doing a sort of descriptive metaphysics in regarding the incarnation of Christ as a radically contingent singular event.

Barth's use of the notion of radical contingency, makes his theological standpoint inconsistent with any metaphysical system which denies the possibility of using singular affirmative statements. W.V.O. Quinn in

Methods of Logic and From a logical point of view, does just this when he pushes Russell's theory of descriptions to its logical limits. Quine argues that singular statements are unnecessary and superfluous in a language, and can be eliminated by paraphrasing any sentence which contains a singular term into the explicit notation of quantification and truth functions. "The whole category of singular terms is theoretically superfluous" and "there are logical advantages in thinking of it as theoretically cleared away."[46] The conclusion Quine draws is that if all singular terms are eliminated, "all reference to objects of any kind, concrete or abstract, is narrowed down to one specific channel: variables of quantification. We can still say anything we like about any one object, but we say it always through the idiom of quantification: "There is an object X such that ....." and 'every object X is such that .....' "[47] This elimination of singular or particular referring statements implies that reference to God's revelation through Jesus Christ as a unique and contingent event is logically impossible. At this point Barth's theology, and human philosophy seem to be standing in a logical relation: if Barth's realism is true, Quine's position is false, and vice versa.

The consequence of Quine's theory is peculiar: the problem is that for any given universal term to be comprehended, some singular term must be known ostensively by direct confrontation, and as such some demonstrative element must be present in the language. "Language without singular terms would be exclusively Platonic. It would not be able to dispense with singular terms: but the only singular terms would be names of universals. We cannot take seriously the ostensible interpretations of symbolic forms of language; i.e. 'There is something which F' etc., where F is a predicate of particulars..... unless the language is admitted to presuppose the use of singular terms to refer to particulars."[48]

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46. Methods of Logic p.211
47. Methods of Logic p.224
48. P.F. Strawson: "Singular terms, ontology, and identity" Mind. 1956 p.449

At the ordinary first order level of truth and falsity, if Barth wishes to stress contingency as he does, this seems to require a metaphysics of a realist type, even if of a very sophisticated type. For to say 'X is a contingent proposition' is to say that its truth value depends on what happens, and not on some logical necessity or definition. The logical atomists produced a verification system, according to which the truth value of an atomic proposition consisted in its corresponding with the facts. There are many difficulties in the correspondence theory of truth, not least that of specifying exactly what it is that is supposed to correspond with what, and also what the relational term 'corresponds' means. Nevertheless, any event, or set of events, such as the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth, which is claimed to be a contingent past event, requires some such verification procedure. To assert that Jesus is at one and the same time very man and very God, is to claim that Jesus is part of human history in a similar way to that in which Frederick the Great is part of History. And to be part of history is to be subject to the same empirical difficulties of investigation which any other historical research throws up. To deny that Christ is part of human history, in the sense that his life evades and escapes historical difficulties of investigation, as in the end to deny that he was very man. If realism goes, the possibility of God's contigent revelation in Christ goes with it.

Barth's uneasiness about allowing philosophy any autonomy in its portrayal of the God who we believe became very man, results from his failure to take seriously his own doctrine of creation. We may grant, that creation as much as the incarnation is the result of God's grace. The doctrine of creation is not to become the forecourt of the temple where Jews and Gentiles may enter freely, the portico, where Natural theology gets its first idolatrous foothold. But if, as Barth claims, God in Jesus Christ is from eternity within the fellowship of the Trinity

the purpose and end of creation, why cannot creation itself reveal God through Christ? It is here that Barth's denial that there are any logical relations, however tenuous between God and man, seems to amount to a denial of the incarnation. God can save individuals through his revelation in Jesus Christ, but can he, according to Barth, ever save the world? Is not Barth's Word of God so much the Word, that it is never the Word made flesh? God's very willingness to become man is surely a demonstration that He does not despise allowing Himself to be limited by the restrictions of the world which He created, when He chooses to so limit Himself.

CHAPTER THREE

LEFT-WING FIDEISM. A CRITIQUE OF NON-COGNITIVISM

1. Phillips' Epistemology

(a) The logical nature of the cognitivist/non-cognitivist dispute

How is it possible to decide whether or not the cognitivist or the non-cognitivist provides the correct epistemological analysis of religious statements? If the appeal is made to what prima facie religious believers say and do in their Creeds and their worship, their doctrinal systems and their popular apologetic, then the Christian religion would seem to be one which makes factual claims at several different levels about the nature of God and the person of Christ.

The dispute is not as simple as this. It is not about what the languages of, for example, the major Christian Churches claim about the factual or non-factual status of key religious assertions; it is rather what the correct analysis of religious assertions is to be, if they are to be genuinely religious. Phillips argues that religious assertions are 'sui generis', and therefore totally unlike any other statement or assertion in any other language game. For Phillips, the task of the philosophical theologian must be to clarify the unique nature of theological utterances, by cleansing them from the superstitious husks which they have caught by being contaminated by non-religious language games.

Thus despite Phillips claims that he uncovers the 'depth' grammar of religious utterances, the cognitivist/non-cognitivist dispute is not an empirical disagreement: the question being asked is not, 'Do religious statements or assertions as a matter of fact contain cognitive elements?' rather it is the question, 'Are statements or assertions which have some fact claiming elements, the most appropriate sorts of statements by means of which to make religious assertions, to formulate prayers, to write

liturgies, to construct dogmatic systems?'

The cognitivist/non-cognitivist dispute is thus a dispute as to what sorts of statements or assertions are most appropriate to provide a system of projection for the nature of God as described in say Christian worship, prayer and doctrine. Just because the question which Phillips is attempting to handle is, 'Which system of projection must be used to describe the God who is the most worship worthy?', and not in the end, 'What language about God do ordinary believers usually use?', he pervasively confuses concepts and the things concepts refer to. This disease is one which is generated by the use of the ontological argument which attempts to reach reality from a concept alone. It is hardly surprising that Phillips major question (although one which he doesn't see clearly) is 'Which concept of God is the most worship worthy? (However odd a question this may be). Findlay in his Ontological disproof of God's existence is like-wise obsessed with the problem of the nature of the most worship worthy God.'[1]

The question as to the worship-worthiness of a God is, not merely a factual question. It can be restated as 'Which god ought I to worship'? The cognitivist will obviously answer: The god whose existence is a logical possibility. The non-cognitivist will answer: The god to which specified religious attitudes are the most appropriate.

But how do I decide which god is the most worship worthy? The attempt to answer this question involves not only the factual question of what various concepts of God there are, but also the evaluative question of which god ought to be worshipped. However if this question is to be answered, it is clear that the answer will involve attempts to persuade others that a given concept of God is the best one, and attempts to comment upon one concept of God rather than another.

(b) Persuasive definition

Phillips claims that his methods are strictly empirical in that he

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1. Flew and Macintyre. New Essays in Philosophical Theology. pp.47ff

is looking to see how religious language is actually used and providing an analysis of this usage. A closer inspection shows that Phillips' thesis is not as metaphysically innocent as he would have us believe. The title of the book indicates a non-empirical approach. In face of the great varieties of different types of prayers in different religious traditions, to suggest that there is "THE" concept of prayer, which is the only genuinely religious type of prayer is to prejudge the issue.

The concept of prayer is a work of metaphysics gone rampant in that Phillips uses an acceptable form of the injunctions 'every statement has its own logic', and 'don't ask for meaning ask for use', in order to foist on his reader a highly metaphysical form of these injunctions; with the help of the latter he attempts to retain the emotive connotations and imagery associations of the word 'Prayer', whilst redefining its descriptive meaning. Phillips' programme is in fact a massive exercise in persuasive definition.

The weaker form of the 'meaning equals use' thesis is that a single univocal criterion of meaning cannot be used to appraise the meaning of every statement no matter what the context in which it is uttered, without gross distortion of the meaning of those statements which belong to a different logical family from the ones which form the model for the univocal meaning criterion; e.g. in Descartes' case such a model was the language of pure mathematics. In so far as Phillips is using this weaker form of the thesis to criticise Flew, Hepburn, and Munz's univocal use of such words as 'exist', 'real','all powerful' etc. he is quite correct in his objections.

Phillips also uses the slogans 'every statement has its own logic', and 'don't ask for meaning ask for use' to make a stronger claim: this is the claim that if a statement or set of statements have a use, if a language game is played, then the reality of the concepts employed in

the language game, are justified by the fact that the language game is used. Thus he writes: "To say, 'This is the true God' is to believe in Him, and worship Him."[2] Or again Phillips endorses Malcolm's statement: "In those complex systems of thought, those 'language games', God has the status of a necessary being. Who can doubt that? Here we must say with Wittgenstein, 'This language game is played'."[3]

Phillips method in the Concept of prayer is thus very good metaphysics: he begins with an 'a priori' proof of God's existence. Once the ontological argument has shown what God's nature must be like, the types of prayer used in ordinary religious devotion can be redefined so that they will be appropriate to what Phillips considers to be the only worship worthy concept of God.

(c) <u>What does Phillips' stronger thesis prove?</u>

The problem about the use of the stronger form of the thesis 'don't ask for meaning ask for use', is that it tends to prove too much for Phillips' purposes. If the use of a language game justifies a belief in the reality of the concepts described by the language game, then this argument provides an ontological proof for the existence of every concept used in any language game. If the playing of the Hebraic-Christian language game justifies belief in a Christian God, then the same can be said for the Hindu God, the Buddhist God or in the case of Theravada Buddhism, the non-existence of God.

The strong meaning equals usage thesis is thus metaphysical in that it demands that the existence of a concept can be conjured out of its definition in use. This contrasts with the weak form of the thesis which is an injunction to get away from a univocal theory of meaning, whether this be the verification theory, or an essentialist theory such as the strong meaning equals usage theory. To say in the weak sense

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2. <u>The Concept of Prayer</u>, p.149

3. <u>The Concept of Prayer</u>, p.18

that meaning equals use is to recommend a careful investigation of the 'situ im leben' of a statement, before deciding its meaning.

The 'a priori' character of the strong meaning equals usage thesis is illustrated by Peter Winch both in The idea of a social science and in Understadding in a Primitive Society. Winch claims that the concept of 'reality', the concept of 'truth', the concept of 'logic' in a given society or universe of discourse is wholly determined by the language game in which these concepts are used. For example, to suppose that the modern scientific outlook has shown Azande witchcraft to be nothing but superstition, is to ignore the employment of witchcraft language game by the Azande people. The problem which Winch builds round himself is that if there is no common logical form, no common concept of truth and reality which cross-cross and interlocks with all the diverse possible language games how can different cultures such as those of Modern Western society, and that of the Azande tribes ever communicate at all? Each has its own language game, but each game subsists, granted that they have no common logical form, in splendid isolation.

This 'isolationist' language game theory is 'a priori' because once a language game is seen to be played, the criteria of each such games meaningfulness and reality are purely internal and hence comparative culture and comparative religion are logically impossible. As A.K. Louch puts it:

"Winch wishes to reject the comparison of Christian baptism with other instances of ritual purification. The grounds of his rejection of these interesting comparisons are clear enough: if he is to explain baptism 'a priori', the rite must be deducible from a set of conventions, or espoused theory, i.e. Christian theology and ritual. If the historian were to find the roots of Christian baptism in earlier rites of purification, his thesis would entail assertions of temporal, and perhaps causal

sequence, which would require empirical research. To say that an action is a convention is to say among other things that it is not idiosyncratic, and this is a truth that can be discovered only by observation. It is surely not discoverable by lexicography or grammar alone."[4]

A further problem for the strong (meaning equals usage) thesis is how a language game is to be delimited. If every statement has its own logic does this mean, there is no common logical form between any two statements, so that no two statements have any logical relation the one to the other? More seriously, if each language game has criteria of truth and reality internal to itself, what grounds are there for dividing language games up into science, religion, aesthetics and so on? Why not divide them further into physical science and chemical science, into Catholic and Protestant religion, and yet further into Anglican, Methodist and Pentecostalist, each with its own self justifying language game? Where in fact is the process of division to stop.

The strong form of the meaning equals usage thesis also implies that belief and understanding are identical, because the reality and truth of the belief are claimed to be internal to the belief in question. It is hard to see what this assertion amounts to. It suggests that to believe X is to understand X and that it is logically impossible to believe X and not to understand X. Further an unbeliever can never come to understand what a Christian believes without becoming a Christian; a Christian can never come to understand what the Azandes believe about Witchcraft, without coming to believe what they believe. This move therefore gets rid of any problems of verification or falsification by a definition; for if belief and understanding are identical, then once I believe X I understand that it is true and the problems of how I can know a proposition to be true, which I first understand without knowing its truth, cannot be raised.

It is easy to see what it means to say that in the case of some statements belief and understanding are simultaneous; I can understand

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4. A. L. Louch. "The very idea of a social science" Inquiry vol. 6. 1963 pp.280 and 283

and believe at one and the same time the statement that I am now typing with a black ribbon on white paper. But the fact that my belief and understanding are simultaneous in this instance, does not make them identical. I could be deluded about my sitting here typing: I might be either dreaming, drunk , or under the influence of drugs.

This point raises another issue about the stronger thesis: How can it account for illusions and delusions. If my understanding X and my believing X are not merely simultaneous, but are identical, can I ever be said to suffer an illusion? Certainly if this thesis is correct there can be no concept, however open textured of reality and unreality, of truth and falsehood; the concept of reality and unreality are internal to the language game which is being played, Phillips writes:

"One cannot contrast something called 'hallucinatory prayer' with something else called 'normal prayer'. One cannot contrast hallucinatory experiences of the Virgin Mary with normal experiences of the Virgin Mary."[5]

The internal criteria which determine the reality or unreality of the vision are the compatibility of the vision or prayer with the religious tradition in which the vision or prayer is claimed to have taken place.

"One may claim to have had a religiously significant vision, but whether the vision has such religious significance is determined by the religion within which the vision is experienced, or at least, by the religion which influences the vision."[6]

This position commits Phillips to saying that if a prayer or vision occurs within a given religious tradition, it is genuine: if however the prayer or vision does not occur within a religious tradition, it is by definition not a prayer or not a vision, and hence cannot be an hallucination.

To say this is to deny the ordinary use of 'normal' and 'hallucinatory'

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5. Op Cit. p.33

6. Phillips Op. cit. p.36

in religious language. Surely some prayers are normal, others odd; some visions 'normal', others 'hallucinatory.' A vision of the virgin Mary could well be genuine, if it was seen by a good Christian in the course of his daily prayers. But surely every vision of the Virgin Mary seen by a good Christian in a sound Christian tradition is not necessarily genuine? It is not self-contradictory, as it must be if Phillips is correct in identifying belief and understanding, to say, 'I thought I had a vision of the Virgin Mary in chapel this morning, but it was really a hallucination.' The fact that there is a language game in which genuine visions of the Virgin Mary are described, presupposes criteria other than that of compatibility with existing traditions for distinguishing genuine and non-genuine visions. To say there is a concept of what it is to have a vision of the Virgin Mary, implies that the concept of what it is to have such a vision is itself based on what is taken to be a vision or set of visions of what the Virgin Mary really is like. If not, then it is hard to see how the language games of visions of the blessed Virgin ever got off the ground. Of course all visions of the blessed Virgin Mary may be illusory; the concept may have no reality. But if the reality of the concept is to be taken seriously, it is hard to see how the distinction between genuine and hallucinatory visions can be ignored.

Phillips makes a similar definitional victory in refusing to allow a distinction between 'Normal' and 'odd', or 'self-deceiving' acts of prayer. He writes:

"In prayer what is said can only be said directly to God. This is an analytic statement, since what is said is God's language as it were."[7] This statement is true only if it is made so by definition. Suppose someone says, 'I pray every night, but I never pray to God, but to the Virgin Mary.' Phillips would presumably reply to such an instance, that

7. Op. Cit. p.52

may be what is said at an empirical level is what we would normally call a prayer, but since it is not addressed to God, my definition of prayer will not allow such an instance to count as prayer.

Firstly there do seem to be situations in which it is possible to say a person has prayed, but has not prayed correctly. In South America it seems to be the case that some naive Roman Catholics regard local saints as a substitute for God, and they pray to them for particular blessings and benefits. These South Americans are not merely asking their saints to pray and intercede to God for them, (which is the Orthodox doctrine of the intercession of the Saints), but are making petitions directly to the saints. Now an Orthodox Christian may call these prayers superstitious, but it is not logically self-contradictory as Phillips argument requires to call them prayers.

Secondly, surely the Orthodox doctrine of the intercession of the Saints, is an example of prayers which are prayers not made to God. The Christian prays to a saint, that he may intercede with God on the believer's behalf. J.H. Newman in Tract XC suggests that in the intercession of the saints, God is continually reminded by the saints of the importance of the contingent particularly of the created order. I am unhappy about saying that God either can be or needs to be reminded about anything. I think that the doctrine of the Intercession of the saints is designed to stress God's determination to show his concern for the particularities in the world, despite his omnipotence. It is not surprising that Phillips who has no interest in God's relation to contingent particulars should ignore this form of prayer. If Phillips is willing to take any notice of the 'depth' grammar of religious belief at all, he cannot deny that this language game is played: is it not then a falsifying instance of his claim that prayer is only prayer when it is prayed to God?

A further consequence of this reduction of understanding to belief, is that our knowledge of God is restricted to "knowing how". Religious kniwledge for Phillips is not a "knowing that" the world is of such and such a nature, and that it is related to God in such and such a way: rather it is "knowing" how to play the religious language game, a "Knowing how" to pray, and how to pray aright. He writes:

"To say 'This is the true God' is to believe in Him, and worship Him"[8]

There are clear examples of people who know how to do something, without their being able to explain the 'knowing that' involved. A great novelist is none the less great if he is unable to explain in propositions the method or technique of writing a great novel. Alternatively many people can drive a car and know how to handle it on the road, without having the faintest idea of the effect their driving the car has on its mechanical parts.

Phillips strong meaning equals usage thesis however is claiming more than that many people can know how to pray to God without knowing the correct philosophical analysis of the relation of a man who is praying to the God to whom he prays. He is saying that if I know how to pray, neither I nor anyone else needs to get worried about what it is to know the rules, regulations and theories about God's relation to man in prayer. Just as belief and understanding are identical in Phillips, so are the "knowing how" and the "knowing that" of prayer.

This throws light on the way Phillips gets rid of the possibility of the misuse of prayers, and of the possibility of hallucinatory visions; If "knowing how" and "knowing that" are identical, no conceptual criticism of a "knowing how" is possible. But surely "knowing how" is in the end parasitical for its justification on knowing that: I know

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8. Op. cit. p.149

that to make my car go faster or slow down, and can take my foot off the accelerator and put it on without thinking about what I am doing when I do this. But my knowing how to operate the accelerator presupposes that someone knows that depressing the accelerator increases the flow of petrol to the engine and so increases the frequency of the explosions in the cylinders.

Similarly in the case of prayer; many Christians know how to pray to God: but this presupposes that at least some Christians spend their time thinking about what sort of a God it is who is interested in our prayers, and who cares sufficiently about his creation to listen to the supplications of his creatures.

Phillips allows no account of what we can know about God to be given: understanding and belief are identical, so to know God is not to know something about him, but to believe in him. The question about what sort of God it is that Phillips exhorts us to believe in, is a question the possibility of which is ruled out by the identification of "knowing how" and "knowing that". Phillips seems to think that the more unintelligible and obscure he makes his concept of God, the more this concept approximates to the true God.

2. Prayer and ordinary language

The Concept of Prayer claims to be an examination of the ordinary use of prayers on their home ground. Phillips insists that 'depth' grammar reveals that God is a logically necessary being. All religious activity must be restricted by the nature of the God towards whom this activity is directed. Barth similarly argues that the nature of dogmatics must be determined by the object it studies (i.e. God). But Barth's God is free to reveal himself, or to refuse to do so whenever he sees fit. The God conjured into existence by the ontological argument has not got this absolute freedom: he is a logically necessary being, and in the nature of

the case is unchanging and unchangeable. Phillips refuses to allow any type of prayer to be genuine prayer which it is not appropriate to offer to a logically necessary being: He attempts to reduce all types of prayer which will not be appropriate to his concept of God, to types which are appropriate. Phillips accepts prayers of confession and thanksgiving as genuine prayers, but subtly changes the meanings these types of prayer possess in ordinary usage.

Prayers of confession are normally used in a situation where a person or congregation ask God to forgive them for their sins. The believer is then given God's forgiveness, either by a minister, or by his personal awareness that God has forgiven him. God alone has the power to forgive sins, and his central means of forgiveness was his atoning action through Jesus Christ on the cross. The common sense idea of confession is clearly brought out in the Prayer Book communion service.

"We earnestly repent, and are heartily sorry for these our misdoings; the remembrance of them is grievous unto us; the burden of them is intolerable. Have mercy upon us, have mercy upon us, most merciful Father; for thy Son our Lord Jesus Christ's sake, forgive us all that is past; and grant we may ever hereafter serve thee in newness of life."[9]

For Phillips, the forgiveness appropriate to an act of confession does not seem to be an act on God's part; it is a means of getting to know oneself. Thus "in coming to know God one comes to know oneself"[10] Belief in God is a necessary condition of self-understanding, but God in no way participates actively in this process of self-forgiveness. It is hard to see how Phillips attaches any meaning to the opening sentence of the traditional Anglican canon of consecration:

"Almighty God, our heavenly Father, who of they tender mercy didst

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9. 1928 Prayer Book p.346

10. Op. cit. p.63

give thy only son Jesus Christ to suffer death upon the cross for our redemption; who made there (by his one oblation of himself once offered) a full perfect sufficient, sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world."[11]

Prayers of thanksgiving are also treated in a reductionist manner by Phillips. A genuine prayer of thanksgiving is, he asserts, not thanking God for this or that, but thanking God for the whole of existence. This is not the ordinary usage of thanksgiving in prayer as is shown by the general thanksgiving[12] where various features of existence are singled out as meriting thanksgiving, but in particular "the redeption of the world by our Lord Jesus,Christ".

A further problem about this analysis of thanksgiving is, 'is it a logically possible analysis of the concept?' It is clear what I mean by the word 'thank' when I thank John for the birthday present he gave me. Similarly, I know how I am using the word 'thank' when I say that I am thankful to my parents for being firm with me, and sometimes punishing me for my own good, when I was young. But what does it mean to say, as Phillips does that I ought to thank God, not for this or that, but for everything for the whole of my life? Both Phillips and J.R. Jones suggest that this is the most appropriate attitude to life; "For to be able profoundly to give thanks for existence is the same as acceptance of the world, acceptance of life. And this what being happy means - being in agreement with the world".[13] The word 'thank' has a clear use when used of particular things in the world; but when it is applied to the world as a whole it is pushed beyond the bounds of its meaningful use. Just as the concept of cause becomes meaningless if taken from its application to the relationships between particular events and applied to the universe as a whole, likewise a category mistake is committed if the

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11. 1928 Prayer Book; p.349
12. 1928 Prayer Book, p.151
13. "In J.R. Jones "Love as the Perception of meaning." Phillips: Religion and understanding. p.152

word 'thank' is applied to the universe as a whole rather than particular things for which we may be thankful.

It is also hard to know what it means to say that a person ought to be thankful to God no matter what happens to him; If gratitude is inappropriate in a particular situation (.e.g. if a close relation at the height of his career is dying of cancer), to insist that words of thanks be used to describe my response to the situation, is to insist that the word 'thanks' be used vacuously: if 'thanks' are appropriate to God no matter whether the world treats me justly or unjustly, why describe my attitude as one of thankfulness rather than unthankfulness? If no situation occurs in which it is inappropriate to give thanks, is it meaningful to say that a situation occurs in which it is appropriate to give thanks?

Prayers which cannot be offered to a God who is a logically necessary being, Phillips dismisses as superstitious. "In the face of prayers which do not fit readily into my exposition, all I can do is to note them and leave it at that. I do not say that they are not prayers (who is a philosopher to say that?) but simply that I do not understand what is involved in them".[14]

The most obvious example of prayer which is inappropriate to a logically necessary being is petitionary, or intercessory prayer. Ordinary language suggests that a large part of our public and private prayer is intercessory: that is, it asks God to make some change either in the state of affairs in the world, or in the spiritual state of ourselves or of others. For example the collect for the Fifth Sunday after Trinity runs: "Grant O Lord we beseech thee, that the course of this world may be so peaceably ordered by thy governance, that thy Church may joyfully serve thee in all Godly quietness, through Jesus Christ our Lord". Similarly the Collect for the Sunday before Advent runs: "Stir up, we beseech thee, O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people, that they may plenteously

14. Op. cit. p.8

bring forth the fruit of good work, and may of thee be plenteously rewarded."[15] As far as private prayers are concerned, I can only speak from my own experience, but I do find myself frequently praying for specific solutions to specific problems: for peace in Vietnam, for an end to the cold war, for the safe journey of a friend, for a relation in sickness and so on.

Whatever the prima facie evidence of ordinary language may be Phillips thinks that any form of petitionary prayer is superstitious: to be genuinely religious is to thank God for everything there is, whether it is good or bad. He claims that what we are really doing when we use petitionary prayer is showing God the strength of our desires. "When deep religious believers pray for something, they are not so much asking God to bring this about, but in a way telling him of the strength of their desires."[16] But if this is so, why has petitionary prayer not died out in sophisticated Christian belief as a primitive superstition? How does Phillips explain the strength of the persistence of the use of petitionary prayer? Further why does he decline to present detailed examples of reformulated petitionary prayers in which for every occurrence of 'Lord, will you do X' a form of the statement 'Lord, I feel very strongly about X' is substituted? But any such move would surely commit a category mistake of supposing that a request for an active response is nothing over and above an intense expression of desire?

God for Phillips is unchanging and omniscient. It is therefore impossible to tell God anything he doesn't already know. Further, if both God is an unchanging logically necessary being, and he knows everything that is going to happen in the future, is not the possibility of the existence of contingent events in his creation ruled out? If God has planned from eternity everything that is going to happen in the universe

15. The Book of Common Prayer. Collects for Trinity 5, and the Sunday before Advent.

16. Op. Cit. p.121

and God's nature is unchanging what is the point in asking for an alteration in the detail of the history of the universe? For a theological determinist, part of God's plan could be that people will use petitonary prayers at certain points in the plan, and yes or no answers built into the course of events will be part of the plan from the beginning. The difficulty about petitionary prayer in this type of metaphysic is that the petitionary questions and answers are all engineered; because of God's pre-ordained plan, people have no choice but to ask certain things of God. But this is not genuine asking and answering: part of the meaning of saying 'I ask X' or 'I grant X' is that I needn't have asked if I hadn't wanted to, and that my prayer need not have been answered.

A remarkable feature of Phillips supposedly empirical analysis is his lack of discussion of the New Testaments notions of prayer. The one quotation he does offer suggests a reference to Christ's words in the garden of Gethsemene: "Thy will not Mine be done".[17] He goes on to suggest that Petitionary prayer is in the end such a submission to the will of God.[18] But here he is paying attention to the surface grammar and not to the depth grammar of Mark. The whole of verse 36 reads (R.S.V. text): "And he said, Abba, Father, all things are possible to thee, remove this cup from me; yet not what I will, but what thou wilt. "Christ addresses God not as a being who is outside participation in human language, or who is a being we cannot understand: Christ as very man addresses God as Father, one of the most personal of terms. This verse seems to presuppose that had Jesus asked for the removal of the cup, for the removal of the necessity for his passion, God could have removed it. What happened, 'how' things are, was important for God's redemption of mankind. 'How' Jesus behaved was a crucial factor in his redemptive action. This verse seems to contradict Phillips whole thesis, since the verse presupposes: a) God could have answered Christ's petition for the removal of the cup, if Christ had insisted that he did. b) The history of the 'how' of the world depended on Christ's refusal to take

17. Mark. 14 : 36
18. Phillips Op. cit. p.122

the easy way out, and not ask for God to deliver him from the passion.

There is a strong tendency of would be radical theologies in both the Catholic and Protestant camps, to leave redemption to God and let the world go to the devil. This is shown clearly in Phillips view that God can never be said to act in the world. God shows himself in the fact that the world exists, not in 'how' it exists. Phillips leaves salvation to the naughting, or the self negation of the individual, and ignores the importance to God of the social circumstances and obligations in which men find themselves.

3. Religious Dependence

The naturalistic fallacy in religion is the definition of the will of God in terms of natural events or phenomena. To say the world depends on God, is not Phillips argues, to say that there is any causal or logical relation between the world and God: the relation of the believer to God is 'religious', in that man loves God and accepts the world by continuing to remain faituful to God no matter what happens in the world. "To see the word as God's creation is to see meaning in life. This meaningfulness remains untouched by evil in the world because it is not arrived at by inference from it."[19]

Phillips argues that to say there is a causal relationship between God and the world, or to say that there are logical relations between statements about God and statements about the world is to make belief in God into an experimental hypothesis, or in the case of Wisdom's technique of connecting and disconnecting into a non-experimental hypothesis.[20] He insists that all fact claiming statements are some form of experimental hypothesis. Therefore to say that there is any sort of logical or causal relationship between God and the world is to make God

19. Op. cit. pp. 97 - 98

20. Cf. p.2 Phillips "Wisdom's Gods" Philosophical Quarterly January 1969 pp.15

into a hypothetical entity.

But is Phillips univocal view of fact claiming statements correct? Are all fact claiming statements some type of hypothesis? I think not. When I say 'there is a desk in my room', I am not stating an experimental hypothesis, in the way in which I would be doing if I offered an analysis of the rectilinear propagation of light. I do not infer from sense data, or from any other sorts of entity that there is a desk in my room. If I do, when and how do I perform the inference, and why am I never aware of making such an inference? If this possibility is ruled out, is my belief that there is a desk in my room a non-experimental hypothesis? No. It is not a hypothesis in any sense of this word. If my belief about my desk is a hypothesis, then I seem to be committed to saying that all beliefs about the material world are some sort of hypothesis. But the term 'Hypothesis' implies: a) that several similar phenomena are being related in order that their common cause may be explained; and b) that the relation of the phenomena to the common cause is inferential. The desk in my room is a particular entity. Further I do not know it as the result of an inference.... I see it. Therefore I cannot see that there is any ground for saying that my belief about my desk is a hypothesis of any sort.

Does the belief that the 'how' of the world counts against its creation by a good omnipotent God make the belief in this God an experimental hypothesis? Phillips criticises Flew, Mitchell and Crombie for supposing that evil in the world counts against the existence of a good omnipotent God. This is not surprising since Phillips' God is a logically necessary being who cannot be said to be related in any way to the contingent particulars of the world. Phillips presses his argument by using a fork technique: Belief in God is either non-cognitive, or it is an experimental hypothesis. There is room for no third alternative.

Apart from the assertion of his position, Phillips gives no reasons why there should not be factual beliefs about God which are not hypotheses. God, like our perception of a material object is not inferred from the nature of the world. Rather the nature of God and the nature of the world illuminate the factual content of each other.

The major defect in Phillips' treatment of the possibility of cognitive belief, is his refusal to allow the possibility of informal factual beliefs as well as the formal factual hypothesis. Newman's distinction[21] between 'Notional' and 'real' assent is surely pertinent here. Phillips makes all cognitive beliefs 'notional' in the sense that he insists they must be some type of hypothesis, and thus, if he is consistent he must say that all beliefs about the material world are in the form of general propositions, and are formally inferential in character. Newman rightly insists that most beliefs held in ordinary life are not so formalised; they are certainly factual, cognitive beliefs, but they are beliefs about particular objects and are the results of 'direct' perception, rather than of any formal techniques.

a) What sort of theodicy does Phillips use?

What sort of alternative theodicy does Phillips non-cognitive belief have to offer? He seems to rest on the assumption that any theodicy is more morally revolting than the acceptance of existence of evil in the world. He quotes Ivan Karamazov: "I hasten to return my ticket of admission. And indeed if I am an honest man I'm bound to hand it back as soon as possible. And this I am doing. It's not God that I do not accept, Alyosha. I merely most respectfully return him the ticket."[22]

For Phillips theodicy must be a logically impossible sort of enterprise, because he allows no logical or causal relations to exist between God and the world. The fact that problems of theodicy arise for the

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21. The Grammar of Assent Ch. 4 pp.49

22. Dostoevsky: The Brothers Karamazov. Penguin Vol. 1 Pt. II Bk. ch.4 p. 287

cognitivist he regards as a reason against accepting the cognitivist ppsition.

What is the cost of isolating the world from God in this way? It means that to love God is to accept the world for what it is, and to accept suffering as the school in which we learn to accept the world for what it is, and hence to accept God. "Love of God is sacrificial; it involves a denial of the self"[23] Again: "Man has the spirit of God in him to the extent that he negates himself"[24]

It is hard to understand what it means to say that we must thank God for everything, and thus accept what is, no matter what it is. Suppose that there was much more physical evil in the world than there is. Suppose that each person was so built that he was born suffering from a painful and incurable cancer, which lasted the whole of a person's life. Around the age of seventy each person died in severe pain. The only thing men could do would be to eat and keep themselves alive. Drugs were discovered to relieve the pain, so that men knew for short periods what a non-painful existence is like. But the only type of drugs which will relieve the pain are such that if they are used for more than two weeks at a time they act as a catalyst to the pain, and therefore cease to relieve it. What would it mean to accept God and to thank God for the fact that the world is, in this sort of situation?

Phillips seems to ignore the possibility of metaphysical rebellion once a non-cognitive epistemology is adopted. But if Ivan's rebellion against the occurrence of evil in a world supposedly created by a good God is justified, why is this rebellion not justified in the face of the same phenomena (the facts of evil) in a non-cognitivist interpretation of the universe? Why is not rebellion as appropriate a response to the God we must thank for everything, as to the God who is in some way logically or

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23. Op. cit. p.100

24. Op. cit. p.101

causally related to the world?

Phillips dismissal of the problem of theodicy is no less morally revolting than the alternatives which he criticises. Thus he adopts an attitude towards the existence of evil which might be called 'cosmic Toryism'. He thinks that once evil, and the suffering which results from it are viewed aright, not only can we thank God for it, as part of the fact that the world is, but we can learn from what we suffer: the suffering can give us spiritual depth. "But suffering can also be used to teach one that one is nothing just because it does not tempt one to put oneself at the centre of one's concern."[25]

This statement raises two questions:

Firstly, is it true that suffering is often spiritually beneficial? The word 'Suffering' covers a whole cluster of different types of entity from physical pain to an emotional and also an intellectual kind of suffering. A person is as often completely crushed and immobilised by suffering as he is spiritually benefited by it. Phillips would reply that a person who is crushed by suffering is just not religiously mature: he has not learnt to accept the world and to love God. But here he is just not taking the phenomena of evil and the impulse felt to rebel against it serkously. After reaching a certain intensity, both physical and mental suffering would seem to prevent any sort of thankfulness. Could a person being tortured day by day in Auschwitz thank God for the fact that the world is? Surely many of the people who had to live and suffer in concentration camps were so affected by it that existence lost all meaning: the meaning of the 'that' of existence. Even at a more ordinary level, suffering over something like the death of a wife or husband, can crush a person for years. To say, 'Your wife is dead, let's thank God for it' seems perverse. If God understands human beings in their creaturely state at all, he surely understands the appropriateness

25. Op. cit. p.102

of sorrow at the loss of a loved wife or husband. Consider Jesus weeping before the raising of Lazarus, or at the thought of the future destruction of Jerusalem.

Secondly, is it true for a Christian that man is nothing? The doctrine of creation does or is sometimes thought to imply that God created man ex nibile, but this does not mean that man when he is created is also nothing. Man once he is created by God is something, and has values and rights which make his act of rebellion against the fact of evil a possibility. Phillips analysis allows man no autonomy: if man is nothing, if man's ethical and social values are an unworthy substitute for direct obedience to the will of God, then the world and the creatures in it seem to have no value in their own right. The world, to quote the late Professor C.E. Raven is a stage set for the drama of redemption in which the redemption is all that matters, and the people and creation as such are merely a means to the redemptive end. Phillips seems to deny the psalmist: "What is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou visitest him. Thou created him a little lower than the angels to crown him with glory and worship."[26]

The analysis of evil which Phillips provides removes man's actions from the sphere of responsibility: to say that man depends on God in the sense that man must completely negate himself, and obey God blindly, is in the last resort to say that man has no obligationto try to alleviate suffering and to freely choose to obey the moral beliefs which he imposes on himself. Moral and spiritual responsibility presuppose a freedom which is an impossibility if the self is negated, and God is obeyed, whatever God's will may be. But may not man within the autonomous sphere of his own systems of moral and social values be under a moral obligation to try to improve the social conditions and therefore the 'how' of the world. Does not Christ's command to love your neighbour as yourself, entail an obligation to alleviate human suffering as much as possible?

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26. Ps. 8 Prayer Book text

The concept of Prayer seems to suggest that the more suffering there is, the more healthy the state of religion will be, because then people will be forced by circumstances to learn to negate themselves, and to love God in and through suffering. A welfare state, which is designed to reduce the amount of physical suffering through a national health scheme, a sickness benefit scheme, an unemployment scheme, a pensions scheme, a mental health scheme, and so on, is prima facie unacceptable to this type of cosmic Toryism. Phillips' position is rather like that taken by Bultmann in his essay, 'The significance of the idea of freedom in Western civilisation' He claims that the political and social development of the present "is everywhere like an impending doom on Western civilisation, cultural life being more and more subjected to organisation, while the state becomes more and more estranged from its original and real task of being a constitutional state, becoming a Kulturstaat, and a welfare state..... where mutual relationship is regulated through organisation, trust ceases to be the bond between man and man. Where the sight of suffering is taken away by the removal of the sufferers, the poor and the ill from their families, and from the public, the feeling of security of living is speciously brought before one, and the consideration of life's actual insecurity and exposure to threats is glossed over..... Like gratitude, resignation, suffering, the power of enduring disappears too. Modern man with his supposed legal claim to the good things of life, feels need and suffering to be an injustice and rebels instead of submitting. The blissful power of suffering to bring man to himself..... this power which Stoicism and Christianity both knew.... is no longer experienced."[27]

Suffering and any unstable social order which fosters it must be preserved in order to promote a successful and prosperous ecclesiastical structure!!! The only reply to this is that if the price of having Christianity in society is unnecessary suffering and injustice, this opium

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27. Essays Philosophical and Theological. p.315 ff.

of the people must be put to sleep at once.

It follows from Phillips account of evil that the individual must submit himself humbly before God, and in loving God accept whatever happens in the world. The danger in the concept of humility which Phillips presupposes, is that it is a very ambiguous concept. The danger in saying "Be humble before God, and accept any suffering that comes in love and trust" is that this form of humility may be disguised aggression. An example of this from recent Anglican Ecclesiastical History is the Bishop's of Leicester's (Dr. R.R. William's) comments on the Guildford affair. The circumstances of this incident are still not clear: ~~Bolton had been Provost of Guildford affair. The circumstances of this incident are still not clear.~~ Bolton had been Provost of Guildford before and during the building of the new Cathedral. He seems to have had certain defects in the sense that he was a fairly weak-willed person, and somewhat prone to spread gossip about the brightness of his own prospects. There are some reasons to believe that he was initially offered the job as Dean of the New Cathedral. There seem also to be reasons to believe that he was unpopular with the local property owners and upper middle classes, because he condemned all forms of blood sports. Eventually the then Primate, Lord Fisher, offered the Post to someone else. Protests occurred and the scandal got into the national press. The Bishop of Leicester then wrote a letter to a Sunday Newspaper stating that it was a great pity that the closing years of Archbishop Fisher's primacy should be clouded by a petty squabble over Church Appointments. God works in a mysterious way, and doubtless in the case of ecclesiastical appointments, God's will is done no matter what injustices are involved. We should therefore accept God's will in humility.

Here the notion of humility is being used to cover a pernicious form of conservative aggression. It is almost a declaration of the infallibility of the method of Anglican ecclestical appointments.

Human beings, including clergymen, are in the first instance responsible for any uncertainties and injustices which occur in Church appointments. God, however hard he tries, cannot make injustice into justice. He may already have fitted the injustice into his purpose for the world, but it is fitted into the purpose as an injustice, and never ceases to be this. Those who see the injustice for what it is, commit a sin against the Holy Ghost if they refuse to condemn it for what it is. Humility before the purported will of God is no substitute for that humility which is willing to see and condemn injustice, no matter what the cost to the person who has to do the condemning. As D.M. Mackinnon has said: "What made the circumstances surrounding the appointment of the first Dean of the New Cathedral at Guildford scandalous, was precisely the absence of the sort of publicity which Bentham rightly discerned as the very atmosphere of just dealing. Justice may have been done: but it remains unfortunately true that it has not been seen to have been done except by the minority 'in the know' and those who find themselves able to accept their actions without question"[28]

b) Is there a satisfactory Theodicy?

I have tried to show in the above argument that Phillips' acceptance of evil and his denial of the need for a theodicy is a naive and unacceptable attempt to get round the problem of evil. But is the acceptance of what has traditonally been called the problem of evil, and an attempt to solve it in any sense a more satisfactory move?

I do not think the problem of evil can be solved in the sense that a reason can be given for any and every occurrence of an evil. A perfect theodicy explains the reason for every evil in the world: but if there is a good reason for every evil in the world, then we cannot but end up with the claim that the world is the best of all possible worlds, in the way Leibnitz did. But the fact that we are constrained by the existence

28. 'Justice': Reprinted in the 'Borderlands of Theology' p.148

of evil to attempt the theodicy, indicates that this world is not the best of all possible worlds. If the phrase 'the best of all possible worlds' means anything, presumably it means that world in which the possibility of evil exists, but in which there is no need for a theodicy.

Phillips is correct in seeing that what has traditionally been called 'the problem of evil' presents one of the greatest obstacles to belief in a Christian God. Philosophical discussions of this problem have been re-opened by A.G.N. Flew[29] and J.L. Mackie[30] Discussion of these papers is important at this point, because they both represent a fairly classical positivist critique of religious language; also both Flew and Mackie regard religious belief as some sort of explanatory hypothesis, the view which Phillips discusses and criticises.

Flew and Mackie both present a jazzed up version of Hume's statement of the problem of evil (Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion. Parts I and XI). The charge against theism is that the statements 'God exists and is all good and all powerful', and 'evil exists in something he creates' are logically incompatible.

"There is no view of human life, or of the condition of mankind from which, without the greatest violence, we can infer the moral attributes, or learn that infinite benevolence, conjoined with infinite power and infinite wisdom, which we must discover by the eyes of faith alone."[31] The objection to theism is more fundamental than the objection that none of the arguments for God's existence is valid; a conclusion may be true even if the arguments put forward to support it are invalid, or the premises false. If it can be shown that the terms of the concept involved in the conclusion are logically self contradictory, then no argument can ever support this conclusion. "God is omnipotent; God is wholly good; and yet evil exists. There seems to be some contradition

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29. In 'Divine omnipotence and human freedom' Reprinted in New Essays in Philosophical Theology. pp.144 ff

30. In 'Evil and Omnipotence' reprinted in Pike: God and Evil. pp.46ff

31. Dialogues. Pt. X N.Kemp-Smith ed. p.202

between these three porpositions, so that if any two of them are true the third would be false. But at the same time all three are essential parts of most theological positions; the theologian, it seems, at once must adhere and cannot consistently adhere to all three"[32] Mackie's claim is that 'God is omnipotent', 'God is all good' and 'evil exists in the world' are, if taken together, logically inconsistent, and this logical inconsistency can only be eliminated, either by denying one of the three propositions, or by shifting the ordinary meaning of the words contained in them. I will try to show that if the terms omnipotence, goodness, and evil are analysed, the Christian concept of God can be shown to be logically self-consistent, although whether such a concept refers to an existent entity will remain an open question.

i) <u>God is Omnipotent</u>

Mackie outlines what he considers to be the paradox of omnipotence. This arises from asking the question, "Can an omnipotent being make things which it cannot subsequently control?", and "Can an omnipotent being make rules which then bind himself? If an omnipotent being can make rules which then bind himself, the rules once made, reduce the omnipotent being to impotence in relation to the rules. If an omnipotent being cannot make rules which then bind himself, the omnipotent being is not really omnipotent, for there is at least one thing which he cannot do. Mackie suggests that the paradox is clarified by distinguishing first order omnipotence (omnipotence I) which is the unlimited power to act, and second order omnipotence (omnipotence II) which is the unlimited power to determine what powers to act certain things shall have. Mackie thinks that if Omnipotence I, then nothing can act independently of God; but if omnipotence II, then God no longer possess omnipotence I.

There is thus an ambiguity in the notion of omnipotence: do we mean when we say God is omnipotent that he can do anything whatever.... that

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32. Op. cit. p.47

his power is totally unlimited. If so then God can create male bitches, female husbands and round squares. But can even God do what is logically impossible? Are we to say: a) God's inability to do what is logically impossible limits his omnipotence, or b) that to be limited by what is logically impossible is not to be limited at all? Mackie seems to think that God's inability to do what is logically impossible limits God's omnipotence. "This account of logic" i.e. (that God creates the laws of logic) is clearly inconsistent with the view that God is bound by logical necessities unless it is possible for an omnipotent being to bind himself"[33] Mackie seems to be working on a very crude model: he seems to assume that God exists for a time omnipotently, and absolutely independently of the laws of logic, and then decides to limit this omnipotence by creating logical laws. But the concept of God, or anything else existing is impossible unless the laws of logic are presupposed. If God existed for a time t before he created the laws of logic, then he could equally meaningfully be said to have hot existed for this perfbd, or to have spent the time drawing square circles. But to say God is limited because any meaningful description of him presupposes logical limits, is not necessarily to say that he is limited at all. If God were absolutely unlimited, he would be able to do and to be anything and everything; perfectly good and perfectly evil all the time; existent and non-existent all the time etc. But a being of such an unlimited nature, is not this rather than that, and hence is not anything.

I wish to argue that by saying God is omnipotent, I am saying not that God's nature and power are absolutely unlimited, but that God's nature is such that the properties he does possess, are unlimited. Donald Hudson puts forward a similar view to this in "An attempt to defend Theism" "The all-power attributed to God is invariably all power in goodness. This is a qualified sort of power, and one's conception of it will be determined

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33. Pike Op. Cit. p.50

by what one takes to be the highest good. Suppose one takes that to be love. Then the all power which one claims for God, will be the capacity to go on loving through all rejection and opposition. The claim will be that nothing diminishes or destroys this love. The contention will not be that God is two distinct things viz., loving and powerful but that his love is his power."[34]

I think that Hudson's point can be put more effectively, if it is stated more formally. Power is a predicate of a logically different type from predicates such as 'love', 'hatred', 'size' 'quickness' and so on. To say something or someone is powerful is to say that they or it are powerful in respect of something. Thus the American army is powerful in respect of the number of ground to air guided missiles which it has in readiness. Harold Wilson is powerful in respect of his office as Prime Minister. Cassius Clay is powerful in respect of his size and physique. God is powerful in respect of being all loving, all merciful, completely just and so on. "Powerfulness" is thus a second order predicate in that it states a quality of first order predicates. Mackie supposes that omnipotence is predicated of God and then God being all powerful decides which qualities from a list of predicates he will attribute to himself. Thus Mackie assumes that God is all powerful in respect of being able to attribute to himself any properties he likes. But theism has never claimed God possesses this property. Mackie's paradox of omnipotence is based on a category mistake of supposing that power is attributable to a person or thing in the same sense as the predicates in respect of which the person or thing is said to be powerful.

ii) <u>God is all good</u>

Mansel in <u>The limits of religious thought</u> claimed that the fact evils occur " are reconcilable we know not how, with the infinite goodness

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34. <u>Philosophy</u>: January, 1964

of God, but which certainly are not to be explained on the supposition that its sole and sufficient type is to be found in the finite goodness of man."[35] Mansel is saying that the term 'good' has a different meaning when applied to God, from that ~~the meaning~~ which it has in ordinary use. In a similar way Phillips by stating that God does not participate in human language and that his will cannot be questioned by a genuine believer, but only obeyed, is saying that God in the end is not really good: at least not in any sense in which we ordinarily use the word 'good'. J.S. Mill said that "To say that God's goodness may be different in kind from man's goodness, what is it but saying, with a slight change of phraseology, that God may possibly not be good?v.... I will call not being good, who is not what I mean when I apply the epithet to my fellow creatures; if such a being can sentence me to hell for not so calling him to hell I will go."[36]

Thus to say God is good, is presumably to say that God is good in an analogous sense to the sense in which we can say that man is good, but whereas God is perfectly good, man is at the best imperfectly good.

iii) Evil exists in the world God has created:

The problem of evil can easily be solved by denying that evil exists. This can be done by claiming that evil is only an appearance, which is not 'real' if the universe is viewed as a whole, but seems real when part of the universe is viewed independently of the whole. Phillips takes up a position very close to this by saying evil is the ground for metaphysical rebellion if the creator of the world is inferred from his creation, but that if we adopt a genuinely religious attitude we can meekly accept the evil that there is, and offer God thanks as much for the good things we receive, as for the evils we suffer. Is not this in the end to say that evil is not real for the religious believer? I do not

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35. Quoted in Pike, Op. cit. p.41

36. Pike Op. cit. pp. 42 and 43

see how such a position can be held by anyone who takes their experience seriously. If someone dying slowly of cancer is not an example of evil, can the words "evil" and "good" have any meaning at all?

But if God is omnipotent and all good, and evil is real, why is there evil? I will restrict my discussion of this problem to what has been called the free-will defence, because it is at this point that the empiricist attack of both Mackie and Flew has been directed.

The free will defence claims to explain the existence of moral evil in a world created by an omnipotent all good God, by asserting that God gave all men free will to choose between good and evil. Some men sometimes, and most men occasionally choose evil rather than good, but a world containing free moral agents and some evil, is a better world than a world containing mere automata, beings who always do what is right because God has so made them that they could not but perform actions which happen to be right. Mackie restates the case: "To explain why a wholly good God gave men free will although it would lead to some important evils, it must be argued that it is better onthe whole that men should act freely, and some time err, than that they should be inocent automata acting rightly in a wholly determined way."[37]

This defence is sound if: (a) What G.E. Moore called the theory of Organic Wholes is an acceptable theory. (b) In order to be genuinely free moral agents, some men may abuse their freedom and act immorally.

The theory of organic wholes does seem a plausible theory: there do seem to be instances of the value of a whole being greater than the value of its constituent parts. The value of the parts may be neutral, or in fact negative, but the value of the whole positive. Moore claims: "To be conscious of a beautiful object is a thing of great intrinsic value; whereas the same object, if no one be conscious of it, has certainly comparatively little value, and is commonly held to have none at all."[38] In the case of an organic whole, it cannot be argued that a part is of greater value than

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37. Pike. Op. cit. p. 55-56

38. Principia Ethica p. 28

the whole: the positive value of the positive parts alone may be less than the positive value of the whole containing the parts of negative value. The existence of the part of negative value, may be a logically necessary condition of the whole possessing the value it does possess. To quote Wisdom's example: "It is not claimed merely that love is sometimes caused by pain, but that sometimes a case of love contains pain and moral evil as an object and is thus logically dependent upon that pain. It is claimed further that sometimes such a case of love is good enough as a whole to compensate for the evil it contains."[39] It thus seems to be a logical possibility that moral autonomy plus some evil, is better as a whole than moral theonomy plus no evil.

The Flew-Mackie attack on the free will defence consists in the assertion of two theses: the compatibility thesis and the utopia thesis.

The compatibility thesis states that there is no contradiction in saying that a human action is both predictable and caused, and yet at the same time the action was performed freely by the agent. Flew "demonstrates" the existence of free acts by means of his 'paradigm case argument'. 'Words which have no ordinary usage such as 'act freely,' 'free will' 'could have done otherwise', are taught ostensively by pointing to a given action which exemplifies a free act and hence unless at least one example of a free act occurs, the phrase could never have been taught ostensively, and therefore could not have got built into ordinary language. Flew believes that the term 'free-will' has a referent, but what exactly is this? He asserts that a free act is not an action which is uncaused, or unpredictable, but an action which is not externally compelled or constrained. "To say that Murdo was free to ask whichever eligible girl of his acquaintance he wanted, and that he chose to ask, was accepted by, and has now married Mairi of his own free will, is not to say that his actions and choices were uncaused or in principle unpredictable but precisely and only that being of an age to know his own mind, he did what he did and rejected the possible alternative courses of action without being

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39. "God and Evil" Mind 1935 p.14

under any pressure to act in this way."[40]

The utopia thesis claims that it is logically possible that God might have created free moral agents who as a matter of fact always freely choose the morally right action. Thus Mackie "If God has made men such that in their free choices they sometimes prefer what is good and sometimes what is evil, why could he not have made men such that they always freely choose the good? If there is no logical impossibility of man's freely choosing the good on one, or on several occasions, there cannot be a logical impossibility in his freely choosing the good on every occasion."[41]

One attempt to reply to the Flew-Mackie attack which I find wholly unsatisfactory is that of John Hick in 'Evil and the God of Love'. Hick grants most of the Flew-Mackie case: it is logically possible that God could create free moral agents who always freely choose to do what is morally right. He writes: "So long as we think of God's purpose for man as Mackie does, exclusively in terms of man's performance in relation to his fellows, as a moral agent within a human society, there is no contradition in the idea of God's so making human beings that they will always freely act rightly."[42] But there is the further question about men's relationship to God. Is it logically possible for God so to make men that they will freely respond to him in love and trust? In the text of the first edition of Evil and the God of love, Hick claims that it is logically impossible for God to cause man freely to respond to himself in love and trust. He quotes with approval: "It is logically impossible for God to obtain your love - unforced - by - anything - outside - you and yet himself force it".[43] In conversation over this passage Hick once assured me that he did not really mean this was a logical impossibility. But if this isn't what he means, I just don't know what sort of impossibility he is talking about.

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40. New Essays. Op. cit. pp.149 - 150

41. Pike Op. cit. p.56

42. Evil and the God of love p. 310

43. Wisdom: God and Evil Mind 1935, p.10

If Flew's analysis of free-will is correct, I don't think that the Hick line will work. If in anordinary human situation a free action is one that is caused and predictable, but not externally constrained, why is this not so in the case of my freedom before God? If a free action is an action which is caused, and yet not constrained, surely God could cause his creatures freely to respond to him in love and trust, and the action of the creatures would be free, provided the causal mechanism was not some kind of external constraint. Hick ought to be consistent: he ought either to reject Flew's analysis of freedom, in the cases of both man's moral relation to his fellow men and his relation to God; or it he is going to accept Flew's analysis, he must admit that God could cause man freely to respond to himself in love and trust.

I think that the best way to handle the Flew Mackie attack is to deny their central claim outright. It is just not the case that it is logically possible that God could create free moral agents whom he caused always to act morally. Flew claims that just as a young married couple's marriage was a free action, because although caused, it was not constrained, in a like manner, all men could freely act morally, and yet be caused by God so to act. Flew has defined free will in terms of a certain type of causality: this leads to a necessity to distinguish different types of causes. There is a qualitative difference between (a) Cause I: an event or action which is caused, yet not constrained to happen; and (b) Cause II an event or action which is caused and constrained to happen. Compare two types of marriages. In the first two people fall in love. The man proposes to the woman. The woman thinks about it, hesitates, and finally accepts. After a few months of engagement they marry. The causes of this marriage will be diverse: their love for each other; the social strata in which they live and were brought up; parental likes and dislikes. Whatever the causes however, we wish to say in a case such as this that either the man or the woman could have done otherwise

at any point in the proceedings: the girl could have returned her fiancé's ring: the man could have refused to say 'I will' at the marriage service. In the second, a chap makes his girl friend pregnant, and their parents belonging to a respectable upper middle class stratum of society force the man and woman to marry, even to the point of frog-marching them to the registry office. In this case the two people were constrained to marry each other, With the internal and external family pressures they could not have done other than they did. To deny the distinction between these two cases is to go in for a rigid determinism.

The trouble is Flew wants to have his cake and eat it. God must be causally related to his creatures in the second sense, if the creatures are to be in such a situation that they cannot but do freely what are morally good actions. But if Flew wants to say that God causes his creatures always to do freely morally right action in sense one of my analysis, then this type of causality is not strong enough to get Flew's argument working. Human beings actions are all caused in some sense, yes, and they are in some sense caused by God who is their creator. But they are caused in such a way that the human beings concerned could have chosen to act in other ways than they did, if they had wished to do so. If Flew denies this in the case of God, surely he has to say in case one of the two married people, that they could have not done other than they did, but this is to slide into sense II of the notion of cause. A rigid form of determinism, may be the correct analysis of our supposed free action; but this is not the analysis Flew intends to offer of the relation between Murdo and Mairi. Flew's case gains any plausibility it may have from his interchanging the two sense of 'cause' which I have outlined at any point which suits his convenience.

I am not suggesting that "whatever is freely done must be sometimes not done: the power freely to choose the good presupposes the power to choose the bad, and this requires that the bad should sometimes be chosen."[43] God could

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43 J.L. Mackie: Theism and Utopia. Philosophy 1961

have created free moral agents who as a matter of fact always choose to do what is morally right. It is logically possible that man might not have + fallen. Whether or not the free moral agents God has created do in fact always act morally correctly is up to the moral agents in question, and not up to God.

4. Ethics and autonomy

Phillips condemns the naturalisitic fallacy in religion, which is committed when God's will is defined in terms of how the world is. He is only too keen, however, to commit the naturalistic fallacy in ethics, by making the real and the true ethic consist in obedience to God's will. "God's commands cannot become of secondary importance without being abandoned"[44] Phillips makes ethical values internally related to the concept of God. The ontological proof of God requires that everything we know of God is derived from the definition of this concept, and is not arrived at from experience. He writes: "To understand then what is meant by the religious conception of duty, one must understand what it means to believe in God."[45]

(a) The problem of ethical autonomy

"If 'holiness' and 'what is dear to the gods' meant exactly the same, then, since holiness was loved because it was holy, what is dear to the gods would have been loved because it was dear, and holiness would have been holy because it was loved. But... the contrary is the case and the two things are entirely distinct. One is loveable because it is loved, the other is loved because it is loveable... When I asked what holiness was, you did not choose to show me its real nature. You could only tell me something that happens to it; and that was that it is loved by the gods: what it is in itself you have not told me yet"[46]

Plato saw clearly the difficulties in trying to discern the relation, if there is one, between theological statements and ethical assertions. What

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44. 'Moral and religious conceptions of dtuy: an analysis.' Religion and Understanding. p.197

45. Religion and Understanding. Op. cit. p.195

46. Plato: Euthyphro 11 ff. in Plato and Xenopho n Socratic Discourses Everymans Library, p.312

do we mean when we predicate goodness of God? Are we obliged to obey God's will because he, the omnipotent sovereign wills that we behave in certain ways, or because what God wills is as a matter of fact good? If what God wills is good because he wills it, then the statement 'what God wills is good' means no more than 'what God wills is what God wills'.... a tautology devoid of ethical content. But if God wills what is good because it is good, then there must be some standard which is independent of God's will, in virtue of which what he wills is good. Thus God ceases to be an omnipotent sovereign.

(b) God omnipotent, but amoral

One way out of the dilemma is to adopt what might be called a 'naturalist' position. That is goodness may be identified with one of God's properties, in a similar way to which a utilitarian might claim that goodness and pleasure are identical. It is thus possible to claim that what God wills is good because He wills it: goodness is therefore identified with what God wills. If this position is carefully stated, it can side-step what has been called the argument from trivialisation. Granted that if goodness is identical with what God wills, then the question, 'Is what God wills good?' is reducible to the question, 'Does God will what He wills?' But does it follow, as for example G.E. Moore would argue[47] that the question, 'Is what God wills good?' is therefore a pointless question? If a Theologian already holds this position, the question is for him trivial; but there are many people, including myself, who have not yet realised that goodness is what God wills is true by definition, and the putting of such a question, or the assertion of an analogous statement, would be necessary to bring home to such people the fact that goodness is what God wills. Further, the question, 'Is what God wills good?', is significant in the sense that it can be used as a test or criterion of the definition 'Goodness is what God wills'. A hard headed 'naturalist' theologian could claim, that what God wills is good is not strictly speaking an ethical statement, but a method of indicating what

47. In Principia Ethica

study is to go under the name of ethics... in fact this becomes the study of what God wills, without any claim, that what God wills has any goodness beyond being what he wills. This amounts to the claim that there are no qualities over and above the will of God to which the word 'good' can be applied. Perhaps the term ethics might be replaced by the term 'theodics'?

Hobbes holds that God, like a civil sovereign, has the right to treat his creatures, or subjects in any way he pleases, provided he possesses the power to do so. He was convinced of God's irresistable power which gave him sovereignty over all men, and the unquestionable right to use them as a means to any end he chooses. He attempts to reduce moral obligation to a form of political obligation: God is pictured as a civil sovereign, but with unlimited, instead of limited power, with which to enforce his commands. For Hobbes to say what God wills is good, is to assert that God has the power to enforce any command he wills. If God decided that murder, rape and incest were good from 4 a.m. tomorrow, these actions would become good at the specified time, provided God wills that they should. But if in saying that God is good, we do not mean that Tom is good when we predicate goodness of him, do we mean anything at all? To say that whatever God wills is godd, in the end amounts to saying God is not really good at all. Hobbes agrees: "for in the attributes which we give to God, we are not to consider the signification of the philosophical truth: the the signification of pious intention, to do him the greatest honour we are able"[48] In one passage he writes "Our faith consisteth not in our opinion, but in our submission... for the nature of God is incomprehensible: that is to say, we understand nothing of what he is, but only that he is."[49]

Hobbes gives scriptural support to his case, by a superficial exegesis of carefully selected passages from the Bible. In particular Romans 9:20 seems to suggest that God's goodness must be sacrificed on the altar of

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48. Leviathan Molesworth ed. p.354. Quoted Hobbes Richard Peters p.246
49. Op. cit. p.383½ Quoted Richard Peters op. cit. p.250

omnipotence." Who are you, a man, to answer back to God? Will what is moulded say to its moulder, 'Why have you made me thus?' Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for beauty, another for menial use?"

Here Hobbes touches on without discussing, the problem of analogy. How, if at all, do the words which we employ in ordinary usage e.g. 'good', 'powerful', 'loving' etc. refer to and describe, properties possessed by God? Is it reasonable of Hobbes to suppose that the term 'power' can be analogously extended to describe God, and yet deny that the term 'goodness' can be so extended? Hobbes wants to wriggle out of the problem by denying that it is a genuine problem: He asserts that we cannot know what properties God possesses, but only that He exists. But if this is so, then we cannot know that God is all powerful. If, however, it is meaningful to extend the usage of the word 'powerful' or 'sovereign' to describe God, why cannot the meaning of the word 'good' be extended in a similar way? If Hobbes appeals to the scriptures at this point, it seems that the four gospels support the view that it is necessary to attribute goodness to God. Thus "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus said to him 'Why do you call me good? No one is good, but God alone'"[50]

Anyone who defines God's goodness in terms of his will or power, cannot avoid concluding that the term 'goodness' can be eliminated from our description of God, because the same features of God can be equally adequately described in terms of will or power. Hence Richard Price argues: "If there were no moral distinctions, eternally and unalterably right and wrong, there could be nothing meant by his eternal and unalterable rectitude or holiness... what can be more preposterous, than to make the deity nothing but will; and to exalt this on the ruins of all his attributes."[51]

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50. Mark 10:17 R.S.V. text

51. A Review of the Principle question of Morals ed. D.D.Raphael pp.86-87

D.Z. Phillips: God and Ought:

"Many philosophers suggest that..... an acceptance of God's commands must depend on my moral judgement. I want to deny this... What I am denying is that the relation between God and what I ought to do is necessarily parasitic on moral judgement. On the contrary, for believers 'good' means 'whatever God wills'[52]

Phillips argues that in the case of childrens obligations to their parents an 'ought' statement is implied by an 'is' statement, because he claims that from the fact X is my father I can infer that I ought to obey him. "That status of being a father entails certain rights, which children of the father have obligations to satisfy. It is possible to argue from 'He is my Father' to 'I ought not to leave him destitute'"[53] Phillips continues that if one understands what it is for someone to be a Father, one will understand why he ought to be obeyed; likewise if one understand what it is to believe in God, one will understand why it is that he ought to be obeyed. There is something about the institution of the family which bestows moral obligations on the members of the family; and likewise belief in God bestows special obligations on those who accept it. "This is because in rejecting God's will, one is not rejecting one claim among many within an institution such as a family; one is rejecting the foundation of an institution. To reject God's claim is not to reject one of many competing claims in a way of life; it is to reject a way of life as such... Camus says: 'When man submits God to moral judgement, he kills him in his own heart.'"[54]

I find Phillips arguments very confused.

Firstly, I think it is false to say from 'X is my father' I can infer, 'I ought to obey X'. There are certain commands a father could give me which I ought not to obey. If my father was a professional bank robber

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52. Christian Ethics and Contemporary Philosophy ed. I.T. Ramsey, p.133ff
53. Phillips Op. cit. p.136
54. Op. cit. p.139

taught me the trade, and the ordered me to 'do a job' on my own, surely, I would be justified in refusing to train as a robber, if this was in my power, or if not, to refuse to do the 'job' on my own. Phillips however does not wish to claim that I ought to obey my father in every respect, but only in certain respects: unfortunately he doesn't tell us when we ought and when we ought not to obey our fathers. He offers the suggestion that 'It is possible to argue from 'He is my father', 'I ought not to leave him destitute' But if the notion of the fact of fatherhood implying moral obligation on the part of sons is qualified, the analogy between the early and heavenly father is weakened, for in God's case if I am under obligation to do what he wills, I am under obligation to do everything he wills.

Secondly, I wish to deny that it is possible to argue from 'he is my father' to 'I ought not to leave him destitute'. Suppose my father were a lazy oaf who had always been destitute because he was too lazy to do an honest days work. Heavy inflation occurs over a short period. My father can no longer manage to live off my mother's earnings as a char woman, and her wages are not likely to increase. If I plough more of my earnings into the family purse, my father will remain in his lazy stupor. If I leave him destitute, for a period, he might decide to do the honest days work which he is physically capable of performing. In these circumstances, ought I not to let him sink into destitution?

Thirdly Phillips fails to see clearly that the term father may have both descriptive and prescriptive connotations. "No doubt I shall be accused by some Philosophers of having moved my argument from descriptive to evaluative statements," he admits.[55] Consider the word 'steal'. On the descriptive level, 'Thomas stole £5 from X' means 'Thomas removed from X's possession without X's permission a £5 note which X had a right to own'. But the word 'steal' also has emotive, or if a less subjectivist moral theory is preferred, prescriptivist overtones. The notion of 'ought not' seems to be

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55. Op. cit. p.135

built into the notion of stealing. This does not however imply that it is possible to infer from the fact that Thomas stole £5, that Thomas ought not to have stolen £5. The circumstances of the case might be such that Thomas ought to have stolen £5, e.g. if this action was performed in a period of economic depression, and high unemployment, and it was the only way of his preventing his wife and children suffering from acute malnutrition.

Fourthly the 'logic' of imperatives is much more complicated and tricky than Phillips seems prepared to admit. Let us suppose that he means to say in saying that I can infer 'I ought to do Y' from the fact that X is my Father, that 'X is my Father' materially implies 'I ought to do Y'. Therefore 'I ought not to Y' materially implies 'X is not my father'. Unless Phillips is prepared to specify in detail what logical relationship exists between certain factual statements and certain ethical statements, it is hard to see what he is talking about.

(c) Splendid Isolation

Phillips seems to be remotely aware of the problems of the relationship between ordinary human ethics and the will of God. He writes: "I am anxious to avoid a position in which religious language seems to be a special language, cut off from other forms of human discourse.

Religion would not have the kind of importance it has were it not connected with the rest of life. Religious discourse has much in common with moral discourse... on the other hand I also want to avoid the view that religious concepts can be accounted for in moral terms."[56]

In Phillips' philosophy, this statement is not more than a pious intention which is never put into practice. His account of ethics, for example, is so religious, that it is cut off from the will of God. But Phillips' concept of God is itself completely isolated from ordinary discourse: it resides in its own self-justifying language game. Phillips' method is similar to Winch's insight that to follow a rule is to act in such

56. "Moral and religious conceptions of Duty: an analysis" Religion and Understanding. p.196

a way that one's action commits one to and is a sign of, commitment to some further act it portends, whose non-realisation would constitute the violation of a rule. "The notion of following a rule is logically inseparable from the notion of making a mistake. A mistake is a contravention of what is established as correct; as such, it must be recognisable as such a contravention. That is if I make a mistake in say my use of a word, other people must be able to point it out to me..... Establishing a standard is not an activity which it makes sense to ascribe to any individual in complete isolation from other individuals. For it is contact with other individuals which alone makes possible the eternal check from an established standard."[57] Phillips and Winch thus place themselves in the Kantian tradition of fixing a great gulf between pure and practical reason which no formal logical relations can cross. The price of such a move is to create a total separation of religious statements from statements describing the world, or any aspect of it. The problem about such a deep separation is to know where in the end God is placed on the conceptual map, if he has no place in and no relation to the categories of pure reason. Kant remarked in the Grundlegung, that although we can never comprehend freedom, we can comprehend its incomprehensibility. Insofar as Phillips is always telling us what parts of the conceptual map God does not occupy, and never the parts which he does occupy, his motto might well be that although we cannot understand God, we can understand his incomprehensibility.

5. Conclusion

Phillips is a theoretical theist. He claims that he believes in and prays to God. I wish to argue that because the religious language game he plays is totally cut off and isolated from all other language games, he is in practice an Atheist.

It is very hard to pin Phillips down and show that this is what he finally commits himself to. This is because although he says time and time again

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57. The Idea of a social science, p.32

what sort of knowledge, knowledge of God is not, it is wholly unclear what does constitute knowledge of God. God cannot be referred to by any sort of descriptive statement, he cannot be referred to by any sort of non-cognitive human discourse... he is 'sui generis', so presumably any statements which are in any way related to him are 'sui generis'. But if Phillips is not using such words as 'true', 'real', 'genuine', 'being' 'necessary' in some sense which is at least remotely analogous to their ordinary usage, how is he using them? What does it mean to say 'I am praying to the true God, but my use of 'true' in this context is totally different from any other sort of use it has'?

If language used in talking about God e.g. the language used in The concept of prayer is totally unrelated to any other sort of language, it is hard to see how Phillips concludes by means of the ontological argument that God is a logically necessary being. The argument supposes that it is possible to infer the existence of God from the concept of God and nothing else. But the concept of God is defined in language which is parasitical for any meaning it has on ordinary usage. 'A being a greater than which cannot be conceived' contains such words as 'being' 'thought' and the relation 'to be greater than', which gain their meaning from the usage they normally have. If therefore all ordinary language is logically unrelated to God (God is not a participant in human language) how can the ontological argument over get started?

Phillips' book is high flown idealist metaphysics: the cognitivist - non-cognitivist dispute which it raises, rests on an answer to the question, what metaphysical concept of God is the most adequate: Phillips' answer reflects the Hegelian love for the ontological argument. The concept he chooses forces him to engage on a large scale programme of revisionary metaphysics, in which he persuasively redefines the concept of prayer in non-cognitivist terms.[58] It is easy to show that a descriptive metaphysic

58. Stevenson: Ethics and Language, 1944

of the Christian concept of God indicates, that Phillips is wrong, and that the Christian language is cognitive. But Phillips could admit that there is such contrary evidence, yet reply that all cognitive uses of religious language are superstitious, and are never implied by prayer to the 'true' God. Even if we grant that the cognitive concept of God is not worship worthy, whatever is meant by this emotive phrase, neither is Phillips' concept. This is because to be worship-worthy the concept must at least be intelligible: but I just do not understand what sort of God this is to whom nothing has any causal or logical relations, to whom npthing can be told and who cannot understand human language.

Apart from not being a theist, Phillips is not a Christian in that the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, is something which his philosophical analysis can afford to dispense with. The criterion of faith is determined for Phillips by the traditions inherent within the autonomous Christian religious language game.

The New Testament preaches that God revealed himself in Jesus Christ. "And he asked them 'But who do you say that I am'. Peter answered him 'You are the Christ'. And he charged them to tell no one about him."[59] Not only is there no serious discussion of Christology in The Concept of prayer, but the epistemology it enunciates is logically unable to handle a God who becomes flesh. "The fact that there should be anything, that there should be a world, survives these changes as a source of prayer and in so doing remains distinct from any contemplation of objects in the world (cf. Wittgenstein: How the world is completely indifferent for what is higher. God does not reveal himself in the world. Tractatus 6.4.32) Any aspect of the world which one contemplates could become an object of human understanding and utilisation. One cannot say of God, without talking nonsense, that He is an object of human understanding, or that He can be used"[60]

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59. Mark 8: 29-30

60. Op. cit. p.76

The incarnation cannot be given a place on Phillips conceptual map, because the concept of God which Phillips uses is that of a logically necessary being. Presumably the statements describing the existence of a logically necessary being are themselves logically necessary. The statements which describe the Word become flesh, the God who humbles himself to become man, if they are to describe a being who genuinely enters the historical scene, amidst its ambiguities and uncertainties, are in the nature of the case, contingent. Lessing once remarked, "If no historical truths can be demonstrated, then nothing can be demonstrated by means of historical truths. That is, accidental truths of history can never be the proof of necessary truths of reason"[61] Equally, necessary truths of reason cannot be the proof of accidental truths of history. By making all the relations between assertions made about God internal Phillips has cut off the possibility of this God having any logical relations with the history of the world, with contingent particulars, of space and time. Phillips attempts what Barth condemned in those who try to get from abstract concepts of God to the particular actuality of Christ.

I admit that in his chapter on 'God's voice and the concept of community' Phillips does stress the impossibility of understanding Christ's claim to be the Messiah, except against the backgrounds and traditions of the Jewish faith. But this is an example of Phillips' habit of switching when he finds it convenient, from the stronger meaning equals use theses, which makes religious language isolated and autonomous, to the weaker meaning equals used thesis, which stresses only the importance in seeing each statement in the context in which it is made, and as not cut off from its history. It is true that Jesus' claim to be the Messiah cannot be understood apart from its context in Jewish eschatological expectations: but Christ's claim to both fulfil and transcend and modify

61. 'On the proof of the spirit of power'. Theological Writings ed. Henry Chadwick.

these expectations presupposes a logical relation between statements about Christ's biography, and statements about the actions of God, which are ruled out by the concept of a God which is that of a logically necessary being.

Phillips' denial of the possibility of intercessory prayer, is another example of his inability to cope with the particularity of God's action in the world. The fact of the incarnation, the actuality of God's becoming a Galilean living in Nazareth shows God's concern about the detail of what happens in the world. Christians believe that this concern of God is still present in His freedom to give us what we ask of him, when and how he sees fit to do so.

The crucial defect in Phillips' account of the logic of religious language is that he assumes that it is single levelled. Once 'depth' grammar has revealed what the logic of God is like, this univocal logic can be applied to every religious statement, and any religious statement which does not fit into this account, must be reduced to a statement which will, or be eliminated from religious discourse. Phillips uses Wittgenstein's insight that words and statements only have meaning in the stream of life, to prop up a doctrine which leads back to the dogma that to mean is to name. Just as logically proper names are entities which name one and only one thing, and have no internal logical relations with any other logically proper names, so the religious language game, as it were names God, in such a way that there is only one method of referring to God, and this one method of reference is logically unrelated to all other uses of language.

PART III

INFALLIBILISM

PART III

INFALLIBILISM

The infallibilist theory or definition of knowledge suggests that to know a proposition involves being able to prove that the proposition concerned is true. For this theory, knowing is self-authenticating and infallible because it is argued, we cannot know anything which as a matter of fact is not the case. Thus according to this view, knowledge is some sort of direct and indubitable acquaintance with reality. For unless there are some propositions which can be known infallibly, there can be no such thing as knowledge; there can be only true opinion or belief, and thus an unending series of relative viewpoints. If we know a proposition, we must know that we know it, otherwise we do not really know it at all. As Cook Wilson put it: "The consciousness that the knowing process is a knowing process, must be contained within the knowing process itself."[1]

In this section, I will discuss two theologians who I think would both deny that they hold such an infallibilist theory of knowledge, but both of whom adopt it in a limited way in their analyses of how God can be known. Both of these theologians adopt this infallibilist theory because of a misinterpretation of remarks made by Wittgenstein in the Philosophical Investigations.

Firstly, I.T. Ramsey uses Wittgestein's remarks about the relation between meaning and use to try and show that the Anglican Attitude contained in the Thirty Nine Articles is the only means of ensuring that theology is always tentative and so that it reveals rather than conceals the nature of God.

Secondly, John Hick uses the remarks about 'seeing as' in an attempt to show that the only situation in which we can be really sure that the statement "God exists" is true is in the afterlife.

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1. J. Cook-Wilson: Statement and Inference: Vol. I. p.100

Both Ramsey and Hick evade the problems raised for religious belief by the falsification challenge; for both make our knowledge of God either something which we cannot have, or something which we cannot be mistaken about, and which is therefore infallible.

CHAPTER FOUR

MEANING AND USE

1. Fallibility and Infallibility:

In his book On Being Sure in Religion,[1] I. T. Ramsey draws a distinction between being sure in religion, but tentative in theology. It is possible to be sure that the mystery whom we call God is revealed to man. Such sureness in religious belief is threatened and sometimes extinguished by theology. A theological system or dogma, although it may at one time in history illumimate our understanding of God's mystery, may, if during the course of time it hardens and ceases to develop, obscure, hide, or even distort, God's revelation of Himself. In order to keep religion free from any such distortion, Ramsey suggests that theology should be subjected to systematic doubt: we must believe in the mystery of God's revelation but remain ever sceptical of dogmatic or systematic theological formulations in which attempts are made to categorise, or systematise revelation. F.D. Maurice, Ramsey thinks, offers an antidote against theological diseases: "Maurice was suspicious of all theological schemes, of all systems whose verbal rigour concealed rather than revealed God. Sure in religion - but suspicious of all theological pretensions."[2]

Sureness or certainty in theology tends to lead to prejudice, bigotry and fanaticism; for to be certain that a particular theological scheme of system is correct is to demand that we can know God's nature infallibly in this world: but such an infallible knowledge of God's ways can be had only when we see God face to face. In this life we see through a glass darkly; to pretend that the glass is clear rather than frosted is to deceive ourselves into believing that God has revealed more of Himself to us than He in fact has. To accept as sure and for certain any dogmatic theological system whether this be Neo-Thomism, or Existentialism or

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1. I.T. Ramsey: On Being Sure in Religion: Athlone Press, 1963
2. O. cit. p.48

Modernism, is an evasion of the responsibility of discovering for oneself the mystery of God's nature. Ramsey quotes with approval Maurice's rhetoric: "I fear that there are not a few young men who are flying to belief in an infallible pope, because they have not the courage to ask themselves whether they believe in an Infallible God."[3]

Granted there is always a danger of forming a theological system which embodies and categorises God's revelation, and therefore conceals it, what practical measures can be taken to ensure that theology remains as tentative as possible? How can the purity of God's mystery be preserved against the repeated onslaughts of theological and philosophical systems?

Ramsey, again following Maurice, suggests that subscription to the Thirty Nine Articles of the Church of England is an invaluable, indeed an almost indispensible means of ensuring that theology remains tentative. This is because the Articles, if used in the correct context, can bring about the same disclosure of God's mystery which is usually evoked by the Bible and the creeds. "In this way the Articles were ultimately to be set in a context of worship. 'Theological Articles placed at the threshold of our studies, would seem by their very name to testify that God, and not Self is to be the object of our studies as well as of our devotions'."[4]

Ramsey thus thinks that the Church of England deserves a pat on the back. Because the Articles are logically ambiguous, they reveal rather than conceal God's mystery. The Articles are consistent with the Bible and the creeds, but the theological scheme or system with which they are associated varies with the context in which they are interpreted. Thus the Articles about God and the Trinity were interpreted in Deistical terms by the Nineteenth century Deists, and the Articles about the eucharistic sacrifice, the real presence and the Councils of the Church were interpreted in Catholic, if not Roman terms by the Nineteenth Century

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3. Op. cit. p.77

4. Op. cit. p.67

Tractarians. Therefore the Articles: "have a sufficiently loose fit to conform to various contextual patterns. They were accepted by people as different as a Wolberforce and a Newman. So the Articles at one and the same time encourage systematisation and make it problematical."[5]

Hence the Articles of the Church of England define the "Anglican attitude"[6] An Anglican is sure of God's mystery, but tentative, or rather, contextually tentative, about the theological scheme or system he uses to project or describe his knowledge of God. "So we solve the moral and intellectual problems of subscription by affirming verbal formulae which are only 'understood' when (a) they are linked unambiguously through the Creeds with the Scriptures, and (b) in this way succeed in being evocative of Christian devotion, in which (c) are then grounded contemporary Christian judgements and the possibility of genuine theological development."[7]

The question remains why, if the Thirty Nine Articles safeguard God's mystery against systematisers and dogmatists, so many people feel that assent to the Articles is assent to an 'Anglican' system of theology? Surely, the Articles can be viewed as an attempt to systematise and retionalise Anglican theology in the period during and for some years after the Reformation? Further, the motives behind such systematisation were the desire of politicians to ensure National unity, rather than a desire to search for the truth of the mystery of God's revelation, and in doing so to follow arguments wherever they may lead?

Ramsey thinks that the Articles can only come to be viewed as such a fixed system of theology if a mistaken philosophical interpretation of the notion of meaning is adopted. If a word or a sentence is regarded as meaning the thing it names, then such a word or sentence can have meaning if and only if there is some entity which it names. If the Thirty Nine Articles are meaningful in the sense that every word or phrase in each

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5. Op. cit. p.70
6. Op. cit. pp.70, 71, 81, 83, 85, and 87
7. Op. cit. p.81

article names some entity, then they are turned into a restrictive theological system. In other words, if the Articles are interpreted in their 'plain and literal' sense, which is what Ramsey regards as 'the logic par excellence of scientific discourse,'[8] not only do the Articles become a set of theological dogmas, they encourage atheism. "Let no one blind himself to the sheer atheism to which a 'plain and literal' understanding of theology may lead us."[9]

Thus for Ramsey, we might decide to take Article II in its plain and literal sense: "The Son, which is the Word of the Father, begotten from everlasting of the Father, the very and eternal God, and of one substance with the Father, took man's nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin of her substance."

But the plain and literal sense of this article will commit us to a certain theological doctrine as being certain and sure; that is the doctrine of the homoousion: also, he suggests, such an interpretation would lead to atheism; for if we regard the divinity of Christ as being a substance in the same sense that matter is a substance, we might conclude that Christ's divinity was an individual material thing and that since this cannot be observed in the way that other material things can be observed, Christ is therefore not divine.

But the Anglican Articles are theologically tentative, Ramsey believes, if we learn the correct lessons from contenporary empiricism, and especially from the work of the latter Wittgenstein. "Don't look for meanings, look for use" suggests that in theology, as anywhere else the meaning of a word or sentence depends not on some entity the word or sentence refers to, but on the context in which the word or sentence is used. The word 'copper' for example, takes on different meanings in different context of its use: "'Coppers were brisk' we read in the Stock Exchange Reports when the context is that of shares. 'Put it on the copper' says the urchin

8. Op. cit. p.64
9. Op. cit. p.65

in Hackney; 'Coppers only' says the machine in the Tube Station."[10]

Similarly, the meaning of the Thirty Nine Articles depends on the context in which they are put. In order to remain tentative in theology the Articles must be given their 'general and full' sense. This is done if the Articles are understood in the context of the creeds, and behind the creeds the context of classical doctrine and the Scriptures. Insofar as the logical connexions with these contexts are clearly traced, the Articles will, in a similar way to the Scriptures, lead to a vision of God's love and power in Christ. "They (i.e. the Articles) give us... a specimen context, of reliable doctrinal development which, routed through the Creeds and Scriptures, is grounded in the discernment of God."[11] Subscription to the Articles, is therefore not to accept every word in each of them as being literally true; subscription is rather accepting the Articles as a set of guidlines or regulative maxims, by means of which any theological system can be perpetually modified and developed so as to project the mystery of God's being as accurately as the complex nature of such a being permits. Therefore: "Ex animo subscription commits us to one thing only - perpetual development, and it is this alone which justifies us in subscribing ex animo while being tentative in theology."[12]

2. Use and Liturgical Revision

The problem about interpreting what Ramsey is saying when he applies the philosophical thesis that meaning is closely connected with use to the Thirty Nine Articles is that he gives no detailed and concrete examples of how his arguments affect the meanings that can be drawn out from the Articles. A more detailed application of the thesis of the latter Wittgenstein to theology is offered in an essay in which Ramsey discusses

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10. Op. Cit. p.62
11. Op. cit. p.66
12. Op. cit. p.81

the merits and defects of the revised Anglican communion service: the Series II Liturgy. In the Durham Diocesan Magazine,[13] Ramsey develops his argument about the relation of meaning and use, and applies it to a doctrinal dispute about the revised Anglican Liturgy.

This dispute centres around the use and meaning of the word 'sacrifice' in the communion service. The High Church and the Low Church parties in the Church of England interpret this word to mean two different things. The High Church Party tend to follow the Roman use of the word, and to argue that to say there is a sacrifice in the communion service means that Christ himself, really present in the bread and wine is offered by the Priest and people, through God's grace, to God the Father,[14]

The Low Church party on the other hand believe that there is no offering of Christ to the Father: rather Christ is spiritually present to those who receive communion, and this spiritual presence reminds the congregation of the sacrifice of Christ on calvary offered once only once and once for all.[15]

There has been some theological disagreement over the revised communion service because some members of the High Church party thought that the prayer of consecration in the revised service excludes the doctrinal beliefs which this party associates with the use of the word 'sacrifice'. Ramsey summarises the arguments put forward by some of the Proctors in the Convocation from the Diocese of Exeter: "It is said that the new formula, 'with this bread and this cup we make the memorial of his

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13. "Some Reflections on current Liturgical Experiment: Holy Communion - Series II" The Bishoprick, November 1967

14. This is the doctrine implied by that part of the Tridentine Canon which states: "We thy servants, Lord, and with us thy Holy people, offer to thy sovereign majesty, out of the gifts thou hast bestowed upon us, a sacrifice that is pure, holy, and unblemished, the sacred bread of everlasting life, and the cup of eternal salvation" Roman Missal: "Canon of the Mass", Laymen's Daily Missal; Burns and Oates 1962 p.875

15. Thus according to the Anglican prayer of consecration Jesus Christ made on the cross, "by this one oblation of himself, once offered, a fully perfect and sufficient, sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world" Book of Common Prayer "Communion service"

saving passion...' has no precedent earlier than 1549, and that it was then used in all but total ignorance of earlier liturgical practice, and had the express purpose of circumventing the idea of objective eucharistic sacrifice." "..... If this formula be compared with the earliest known liturgical texts, that of the Apostolic tradition, which has so largely influenced the eucharistic prayer of Series II, it will be found that while it might be said to correspond with 'doing the anamnesis of the passion' etc. it stops short of the principal clause in the Hippolytan prayer, viz. 'We offer to thee the bread and the cup'. Thus, 'We make the memorial' cannot be understood to mean 'we offer', and hence the offering of the eucharistic sacrifice is now excluded by the new formula"[16]

Ramsey thinks that the Proctors from Exeter can only justify their conclusion that 'the offering of the eucharistic sacrifice is now excluded by the new formula', because they accept a mistaken belief about the meaning of words. If the phrase, 'we make the memorial' is set in the context of the 1549 Anglican Liturgy, then it does exclude the phrase 'we offer'; for Cranmer and his colleague wrote the 1549 liturgy with this intention. But, he suggests, words and phrases do not have such a fixed meaning. The meaning of the word, 'sacrifice' or the phrase 'we offer' or 'we make the memorial' depends entirely on the context in which they are used, just as the meaning of the word 'copper' depends on whether the context it is used in is that of a tube station, an urchin in Hackney, or a stock-exchange report.[17] Thus: "Whether or not the new formula excludes the offering of the eucharistic sacrifice depends entirely on whether the new formula can be given a 'sacrificial use' in some appropriate context of rite and ceremony, recognising that such a context must have some historical links and be routed in one way or another back to the life and ministry of our Lord Himself."[18]

16. Bishoprick. Op. cit. p.3
17. Ramsey here refers to his discussion of meaning in the book: On Being Sure in Religion; Bishoprick p.5
18. Bishoprick p.5

In other words, just as the meaning of the articles depends both on the way they are linked to the scriptures, and on the context in which they are used, so the meaning of the phrase 'with this bread and this cup we make the memorial' is determined by the context in which it is used. Presumably, if the phrase is used at an Anglican High Mass it means, 'we offer', if it is used at a Low Church Communion service it means, 'we remember Christ's sacrifice on calvary'.

3. Wittgenstein on Meaning and Use:

The main defect in Ramsey's application of the later philosophy of Wittgenstein to the doctrinal disputes which surround the Thirty Nine Articles and the Series II communion service is the simplistic interpretation which he gives to Wittgenstein's discussion of the relation between meaning and use. Ramsey clearly sees that Wittgenstein rejects all univocal theories of meaning, which suggest that the meaning of a word or statement is a thing, whether this is material or mental, which the word or statement names. But the analysis which Wittgenstein gives of the use of words in the Philosophical Investigations is one of the least clear and most complicated notions in his philosophy.

Firstly, the word 'use' is not the only word which Wittgenstein adopts to talk about how human beings manipulate languages. As, G.Pitcher points out;[19] he also speaks of the functions of words[20] of the aims of words,[21] of their purposes,[22] their offices,[23] their roles,[24] and their employments.[25] He does not distinguish clearly anywhere how he thinks

19. G. Pitcher: The Philosophy of Wittgenstein; p.229 ff.
20. Philosophical Investigations, Sections 11,17,274,556,559
21. Ibid. Sections 5 and 21
22. Ibid. Sections 6, 8, 398
23. Ibid. Section 402
24. Blue and Brown Books, pp.103, 108
25. Philosophical Investigations, Section 421

that these alternative phrases differ from his central concept of the use of words.

Secondly, apart from a great diversity of phraseology, in what sense is Wittgenstein using the phrase 'use of words'; for this phrase can mean several different things.

There is the grammatical use of words: some collections of words are grammatically acceptable, others are not. It is permissible to say that 'I drive a large saloon car' but not acceptable to say that 'I drive a malaria bed car'. Wittgenstein is not unduly interested in the grammatical use of words. The grammatical use of words reveal only their 'surface' grammar. He is much more concerned with 'depth' grammar. "In the use of words one might distinguish 'surface grammar' from 'depth grammar.' What immediately impresses itself upon us is the way it is used in the construction of the sentence, the part of its use... one might say... that can be taken in by ear. ...And now compare the depth grammar, say of the word 'to mean', with what its surface grammar would lead us to suspect. No wonder we find it difficult to know our way about."[26]

Words are also used in speech acts, that is in such things as issuing orders, making promises, naming ships, asking questions, giving commands and so on. As J.L. Austin has pointed out,[27] it is important to distinguish illocutionary speech acts from perlocutionary speech acts. Illocutionary speech acts are performed in describing something, issuing an order, asking a question etc. If I ask the question 'where are you?', I have performed a speech act which requires only the act of saying certain words in order for the speech act to be performed successfully. Perlocutionary speech acts on the other hand are such actions as persuading someone to do something, making someone angry, making someone pleased, etc. Such a speech act is not performed successfully, unless

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26. Ibid. Section 664

27. J.L.Austin: How to do things with words, passim

the words spoken produce some additional effect over and above the utterance of the initial words. For example, if I say to someone 'You swine' intending to make him angry, my speech act is successful only if he gets angry and perhaps loses his temper. Speech acts in other words are actions in which we use words to do things. Wittgenstein refers very infrequently to speech acts, and even where he does refer to the use of words to produce an effect in the person who hears it[28] he regards such acts as insignificant.

The use of words can also mean the appropriateness of a set of words to a given context. This might be called the Semantic aspect of the use of words. Certain words or groups of words are appropriate in certain contexts, but in different circumstances are quite inappropriate. For example, 'Well done, sir' would be an appropriate remark to make to a jockey who had just won a horse race, or to a student who had just passed his examinations. But it would be inappropriate to use thise phrase to a motorist who had just knocked down and killed four pedestrians, or to a man who had just been informed that he was suffering from incurable cancer. In order words, certain phrases or sentences go with or tend to be correlated with certain semantic conditions rather than others.

This Semantic aspect of the use of words is considered to be of considerable importance by Wittgenstein. If the meaning of a word or phrase puzzles us he suggests that we examine closely the way this word or phrase is used, and the contexts in which it is appropriate and inappropriate. Thus: "Let us see what use we make of such an expression as 'this face says something' that is, what the situations are in which we use this expression, what sentences would precede or follow it, (What kind of conversation it is a part of)"[29]

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28. E.g. Philosophical Investigations, Section6
29. Blue and Brown Books, p.179

Finally, Wittgenstein's analyses the use of words in terms of what he calls 'language games', and this is perhaps one of the most central concepts in his later writings. Language games are not merely those uses of language which consist of words, such as reporting an accident, recounting a dream, or telling a joke. A language game can also include non-linguistic elements as in the case, for example, of obeying orders or play acting[30] Thus a language game consists both in the use of words and the action or deeds which take place whilst the words are spoken. "I shall also call the whole, consisting of language, and the actions into which it is woven, the 'language game'."[31]

Language and behaviour are not two events totally isolated the one from the other. Either language is itself a type of behaviour and is closely related with non-linguistic types of behaviour. To use a language is therefore to be able to employ certain techniques, to exercise correctly certain abilities. For example, to know how to use the word 'ball' consists in more than the mere ability to point to a ball and say 'this is a ball'. For an ostensive definition can always be interpreted in more than one way. In saying 'this is a ball' and pointing to the ball, a person might be referring to the roundness of the ball, or the greenness of the ball, rather than to the ball[32] To understand the meaning of the word 'ball' is thus to be able to do various things with balls, to throw ball, to fetch balls, to distinguish balls from other toys, to draw balls and so on. An expression has meaning only insofar as it is used in a mode of behaviour, only insofar as it is employed in a language game. For: "An expression has meaning only in the stream of life."[33]

Wittgenstein associates the meaning of a word with its use in most cases, but not all, although he seems to regard the exceptions as of

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30. Philosophical Investigations. Section 23
31. Ibid. Section 7
32. Ibid. Section 28
33. N. Malcolm, Ludwig Wittgenstein: A memoir; p.93

little significance[34] for apart from its use within some language game a word is a corpse, it has no meaning. "Every sign by itself seems dead. What gives it life? In use it is alive. Is life breathed into it there? Or is the use its life?"[35,36]

4. Ramsey's Use of Wittgenstein:

Ramsey ignores the complexity of the discussion about the relation between meaning and use in Wittgenstein, and concentrates on what I describe in the last section as the Semantic aspect of the use of words. This is brought out by the example he uses to illustrate the point he is making about Wittgenstein's philosophy. The meaning of the word 'copper', Ramsey argues, is determined by the contexts in which it is used: its meaning changes from one context to another; from the tube station to the Stock Exchange, from the Victorian cook to the urchin in Hackney.[37]

This point, that the meaning of a word is determined by the Semantic conditions in which it is used is quite unobjectionable by itself. The meaning of the phrase 'turn it off', obviously depends on the Semantic conditions in association with which it is spoken. 'Turn it off', may be shouted at me by my next door neighbour who is disturbed by my radio receiver while he is trying to sleep. The phrase may be a request for an over hot shower to be turned off, and the mixture of hot and cold water reset by a bathroom attendant in a luxury hotel. The same phrase may be used in an attempt to silence a Professor somewhat under the influence of drink, who is spoiling a party with his anecdotes about the days he studied under Wittgenstein.

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34. Cf. Philosophical Investigations. Section 43

35. Philosophical Investigations, Section 432

36. (I am greatly indebted in this section to G. Pitcher's discussion of Wittgenstein's analysis of the relation between meaning and use in his book The Philosophy of Wittgenstein, Chapter 10, page 228 ff.)

37. On Being Sure in Religion p.62

Unfortunately, Ramsey does not develop this analysis of the relation between the use of words and the Semantic conditions which are normally appropriate to their use. For the use of some sets of words or phrases are appropriate in some sets of Semantic conditions, but totally inappropriate in a different set of Semantic conditions. For example, under normal circumstances, the correct context in which to use the phrase 'many happy returns of the day' is when some one is celebrating his birthday. Suppose I hear a loud noise in the house next door to me, I conclude that it is my next door neighbour's birthday party. I rush in and wish him 'many happy returns of the day' When I have done this I discover that the noise was not a birthday party, but a bitter family argument. I have obviously used the phrase 'many happy returns of the day' in the wrong context. Or suppose that an innocent Englishment were to go to a certain social occasion in West African Society. He might see everyone drinking quite heavily and conclude that there was a party going on, and that this was an occasion to propose the toast of the host and other friends. Having said 'I propose the toast', he might discover that this was a funeral wake and not a party at all. The phrase, (I propose the toast) would be used under the wrong Semantic conditions. In both cases, the ability to use the relevant phrase correctly depends on knowing the facts of the case; for example, the social customs of West African peoples. I must in the first instance know whether or not a birthday party is going on. And in the second instance I must know whether the heavy drinking takes place in the context of a party, or a funeral wake.

Now Ramsey suggests that the meaning of the Thirty Nine Articles depends on the context in which they are set: if they are related to the scriptures and Fathers in one way they are capable of Newman's interpretation in terms of Roman Catholic Theology; if they are associated with

the scriptures and Fathers in another way the Articles can be interpreted in terms of a Deistical theological system. But surely, just as it is possible to ask "which is the correct context for the interpretation of the phrase 'many happy returns of the day', so it is possible to ask, 'which context is the appropriate, the correct context for the interpretation of the Thirty Nine Articles?" Consider for example, the interpretation of Article XXXI "Of the one oblation of Christ finished upon the cross"[38] Newman considered that this Article was patient of an interpretation in terms of Roman Catholic Theology.[39] He argues in Tract XC that the parts of the Council of Trent dealing with the Sacrifice of the Mass had not been written when this Article was composed, and so it could not exclude the Tridentine statement about the sacrifice of the mass. Further the phrase in the article 'the sacrifice of the masses' referred to the popular Medieval belief that each mass was itself an individual sacrifice which added to the saving efficacy of Christ's sacrifice on Calvary; Article XXXI was not therefore intended to exclude the Orthodox belief that Christ's sacrifice is the only sacrifice for human sin, but each mass in some sense participates in this one sacrifice. Newman concluded that the doctrine of the Sacrifice of the mass was thus not excluded by the Thirty Nine Articles

But the important question here is "has Newman put Article XXXI in the right context?' Is the article really capable of such an interpretation? And this question is one that can in principle be solved by detailed historical investigations into the situations surrounding the framing of the Articles, and the purpose for which the Articles were written. There would seem to be a very strong case for saying that Article XXXI was written with the express intention of excluding any interpretation, no matter how liberal, of the Roman Catholic doctrine of the propitiatory sacrifice

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38. Book of Common Prayer; Articles

39. Cf. Ramsey: On Being sure in Religion pp.57 and 58

of the mass. For "the offering of Christ once made is that perfect redemption, propitiation and satisfaction for all the sins of the whole world, both original and actual; and there is none other satisfaction for sin but that alone."[40]

The question "Which context is the correct context for the interpretation of the Thirty Nine Articles"? is, however, a first order question. It can be answered in principle by historical investigation, even if the findings of historians on this issue is in practice uncertain and ambiguous. The question is not a second order philosophical question about the meaning of meaning: it cannot be solved by the production of philosophical theories about the uses of words.

A similar point might be made about Ramsey's discussion of the use of the word 'sacrifice' in the Series II communion service. It is true that the word 'sacrifice' takes on different meanings in different context of use: A priest saying the words in the context of the communion: "Christ our paschal lamb is sacrificed for us" does not mean the same thing (I hope) as first world war memorials outside some of our Churches which have written underneath 'The great sacrifice'. But it is surely important to ask "What is the correct the appropriate context for the use of the word 'sacrifice' in Church worship?" And this is a very difficult question to answer; but, it is a first order question, and can be answered in principle by looking at the truth values of the various Christian doctrines of the eucharist; and this in turn depends, in part, on historical investigations about what is the structure of the earliest liturgical texts we possess, and what Jesus Christ himself believed and taught about the eucharist. It is not a second order question about philosophical theories of meaning.

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40. Book of Common Prayer: Article XXXI

Unfortunately, Ramsey seems to ignore the constraints placed on the possible interpretations of the meanings of the Articles and the Series II Liturgy by the origins in history of the words and phrases which they contain. He admits that the uses of words and phrases do have contextual constraints: for example, the random use of a word or phrase does not give it a meaningful role in the language. The phrase, 'si laufen vous happen, aefmnsxqzg, Xaipos' does not acquire meaning just because I used it at 2.00 p.m. today. He admits: "Whatever contextual setting is given to a word or phrase, it must not create arbitrary inconsistences."[40]

It is quite permissible for Lord Goddard to convict Jones of letting his car obstruct the traffic; but we create an 'arbitrary inconsistency' if we conclude that Lord Goddard might, in some analogous way, obstruct the judicial bench.

Ramsey quite rightly stresses that there is not a fixed context for the use of any given set of words or phrases which remains unalterable for all time: the use of words or phrases is not like the selection of a gramophone record: if I select to play a gramophone record once I have made the selection the programme I will hear is fixed by what is on the record. The context and the structure of sentences and phrases is varied by language uses to bring in new overtones and meanings. If we want to describe the sound of an organ, we don't always have to use the phrase 'the organ played'; we might say 'the organ thundered' or even, 'he made the organ talk'; or if we have as little respect for the sound of the English language as B.B.C. sports reporters we might say: 'the organ pealed with all stops out'. Now Ramsey argues that the phrase, 'With this bread and this cup we make the memorial', can be given a use or context which does not exclude the belief that Christ is offered to the

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@). On Being Sure in Religion; p.64

Father as a propitiation for our sins. Thus: "Whether or not the new formula excludes the offering of the eucharistic sacrifice depends entirely on whether the new formula can be given a 'sacrificial use' in some appropriate context of rite and economy, recognising that such a context must have some historical links and be routed in one way or another back to the life and ministry of our lord himself."[41]

The appeal to the contextual implications of the life and ministry of Christ are not very helpful here. What our Lord said and did can only be settled, if it can be settled at all, by historical research; and if there had been no dispute in the first place about the interpretation of the significance of the life and ministry of Jesus, it is possible that doctrinal division over the doctrine of the eucharist would not have arisen.

But can the phrase 'with this bread and this cup we make the memorial' be given a 'sacrificial use' in the way we choose to worship. The difficulty in this suggestion is that such a use would create just the sort of arbitrary inconsistency which Ramsey deplores in the suggestion that Lord Goddard might obstruct the Judicial bench in the same way that Jones might obstruct traffic. The phrase 'with this bread and this cup we make the memorial' has a clear and logically possible use in a Low Church Anglican communion service: it then means that what the congregation are doing in receiving communion is reminding themselves of Christ's sacrifice on calvary, by doing what he did shortly before he was crucified. According to Ramsey, if the same phrase is used at an Anglican High Mass it can mean not only that we remember that Christ died on calvary, but also that Jesus Christ, really present on the altar is offered to God the Father.

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41. The Bishoprick; Op. cit. p.5

But surely the use of this phrase in a High Church Anglican tradition is arbitrarily inconsistent, because of the use given to the phrase, 'with this bread and this cup we make the memorial' in the debate in the convocations over the Series II communion service. The original draft of the revised service contained the phrase from Hippolytus' Apostolic Tradition 'We offer this bread and this cup'. But the Low Church party in the Convocations considered that the use of the phrase 'We offer this bread and this cup' in the communion service committed the clergyman using such a rite to the High Church doctrine of the propitiatory sacrifice of the mass. The Low Church party therefore insisted that the phrase 'We offer this bread and this cup' be deleted and replaced by the phrase 'With this bread and this cup we make the memorial' This was done with the noisily avowed intention of excluding from the revised service High Church beliefs about the eucharistic sacrifice.

The meaning of the phrase 'with this bread and this cup we make the memorial' is determined by the use which ecclesiastical politicians have chosen for it to perform; and this use can be discovered by ordinary empirical investigation. No second order enquiry into a philosophical theory of meaning can change the context in which the use of this phrase was coined and developed.

5. Tentative Theology and Falsification:

Ramsey thinks that the fact that the Articles and Series II can be interpreted in different ways in different context of their use is theologically useful. It is easier to be sure in religion and tentative in theology, if the theological system you have to hand is logically ambiguous. It is because the Articles (and one supposes likewise Series II) are logically ambiguous that they are innoculated against being made into a theological system or dogma. Therefore: "For better or worse, the

Articles are logically ambiguous... they have a sufficiently loose fit to conform to various contextual patterns."[42] But logical ambiguity is not guarantee of theological tentativeness. For example, many Anglican Bishops who have believed that the Articles are logically ambiguous, have yet been willing to persecute members of their own Church who have interpreted the Articles in a very High Church, or in an extreme Low Church fashion.[43]

On the other hand, the adoption of one definite theological system is in itself no reason for saying that the person who adopts it has ceased to be theologically tentative. If, for example, I were to become a Conservative evangelical, I need not cease to be theologically tentative. I may hold very definite beliefs about the nature of the Biblical inspiration, about the invisibility of the Church, and about the use of the word 'sacrifice' in the eucharist; but as long as I concede that there are certain circumstances in which I would admit that my beliefs are false, and then cease to be a conservative evangelical, my theology is still tentative. Theology ceases to be tentative only when a person is prepared to cling to his doctrinal beliefs right or wrong, no matter what happens[44]

The problem with Ramsey's analysis of what it is to be tentative in theology is that he confuses tentativeness with logical ambiguity. And as a result of this confusion, he uses the word 'tentative' in a logically odd way. Suppose a waiter offers me a cup of coffee and says: 'Black or White, sir?' Feeling rather distracted at the time I say, 'Thank you' My reply is logically ambiguous, but it is not tentative. My reply would

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42. On Being Sure in Religion p.70

43. Bishop Barnes of Birmingham is reputed to have refused to institute a High Church clergyman because of the Priest's belief in the real presence and the eucharistic sacrifice. Lord Fisher, then Archbishop of Canterbury, in virtue of his office as Primate of all England, inducted the Priest.

44. An example of this unwillingness to be tentative was a Roman Catholic Priest I once met who said. 'I believe the Pope can't be mistaken; but even if he was I'd still believe him'

have been tentative if I had said 'I think I'll have black, but I'll tell you definitely after I've finished my cheese and biscuits'. Or consider the situation when I ask a girl friend, 'Do you love me?' and she replies 'I like you very much'. This is logically ambiguous because it might mean, 'You're nice, but I don't love you and don't want to hurt your feelings', or 'Yes, I love you, but don't want to tell you so just yet' On the other hand she might reply to my question, 'Yes, I think I love you, but I want to be absolutely sure'. Here, she is being tentative; she says she loves me, but wants to test her feelings before she is absolutely certain. In ordinary English usage a phrase or statement which is tentative makes a definite statement, but adds provisos that the situation may be modified by future circumstances or contingencies. But a tentative statement is not necessarily logically ambiguous.

In the same way a theology which is genuinely tentative is unlikely to be logically ambiguous: it will be a theology which will allow itself to be changed on the basis of new findings in historical research or sociological investigation. For example, if my theological beliefs about the incarnation are logically ambiguous, then the chances will be that I am confused rather than tentative. My beliefs about this doctrine will be tentative on the other hand if I admit that the way in which I interpret the divine nature of Christ's person is in some sense falsifiable. For example, suppose that I believe that the best way of describing the divinity of Christ is the doctrine of the homoousion. If my theology is tentative, I will allow that it is in principle possible that some other equally adequate system of describing the divine nature of Christ's person may be produced; further I will be willing to admit that my own doctrinal solution may be shown to be false; or even that it may turn out to be heretical, if our knowledge about the

development of doctrine in the early Church were to be turned upside down by the discovery of hitherto unknown documents. In other words, whether a theology is tentative or not does not depend on its logical ambiguity, but on whether there are any factors that could show that it is false.

Ramsey wants to be tentative in the sense I have suggested, but his loyalty to the Thirty Nine Articles prevents him from doing this. Not only are the Articles not to be revised[45] but they are a vital means, perhaps even an indispensible means of preventing the development of theological systems, which conceal rather than reveal God,

But why are the Thirty Nine Articles almost the sole means to the end which is a tentative theology? I think it would be possible to use exactly the same arguments which Ramsey uses, to defend the thesis that either the Council of Trent, or the Westminster Confession were the sole means of ensuring that theology remains tentative. A Catholic for example, might claim that the Council of Trent has allowed many different theological viewpoints to flourish within the Roman Church, just as the Articles have permitted a variety of theological opinions in the Anglican Church. But the Council of Trent can in principle be brought up to date by later councils, such as, the Second Vatican Council; according to Ramsey, it is better for the Thirty Nine Articles not to be revised.

Ramsey is in fact a fundamentalist: for just as the text of the Bible is for a fundamentalist the infallible word of God, so for Ramsey the attitude of tentativeness enshrined within the Thirty Nine Articles is a fundamental of genuine faith which must not be tampered with. The Church of England, Ramsey suggests, must preserve its conceptual conservativism; for if the meaning of a word or phrase is determined by the context of its use, then the Articles are logically ambiguous and we can only remain theologically tentative, if the guidelines for our attempts to do theology

45. On Being Sure in Religion pp.83 ff

are logically ambiguous. Ramsey quotes F.D. Maurice with approval: "I look upon (the Articles) as an invaluable charter, protecting us against a system that once enslaved us, and might enslave us again; protecting us against the systems of the present day - against 'Records' and 'Times' newspapers, and Bishops of Exeter, and Heads of Houses"[46]

The Articles may provide the protection against theological systematises which Maurice and Ramsey claim, but at the price of making the 'Anglican Attitude' which is supposedly enshrined within the Articles, infallible. Ramsey nowhere makes clear what exactly this 'Anglican Attitude' is. He says that we must not be over concerned with the articles, but rather with the treasure they were designed to enclose. Therefore: "we must learn to be sure, to give ex animo assent when we can do no other, while all the time being theologically tentative."[47]

Here I am afraid that I think Ramsey is being either confused, or just intellectually dishonest. The Articles may take on different meanings in different contexts of their use. But this raises several separate points.

Firstly, the Articles cannot be treated as logically all on the same level. Some are meant to be taken quite literally, and cannot be given any other contextual position. For example, Article VI 'On the names and numbers of the Canonical books' Some of them can only be taken literally and are now false. For example, Article XXXVIII, 'The Bishop Rome has no jurisdiction in the realm of England' Other Articles such as Article I 'Of faith in the Holy Trinity' or Article XXXI can be given different meanings because they can be interpreted in different contexts.

Secondly, granted some of the articles can be interpreted in

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46. On Being Sure in Religion, p.69

47. Op. cit. p.89

different ways in different contexts, we can still ask what is the correct context for this article to be interpreted. For example, if historical scholarship could show that Article XXXI 'On the one oblation of Christ finished on the Cross' was in fact meant to be a piece of Calvinist theology, designed to exclude every possible meaning that could be given to the doctrine of the sacrifice of the mass, then might not many people wish to say that this article is false?

Thirdly, it is presumably possible to draw up a list of those articles which can be placed in different contexts and be given different meanings. But there is a limited number of meanings which can be given to any Article or any collection of Articles. Article XXXI, for example, could be interpreted in a Calvinist sense, a Tractarian sense, a Modernist sense, and soon; but any such listing of the various possibilities is finite. Further it is a logical possibility that all the various alternative interpretations of any given article will all be false; or at least it is possible to state what in principle would show that the Calvinist, Tractarian or Modernist interpretation of Article XXXI are false.

Now Ramsey does not seem to identify the 'Anglican Attitude' of tentativeness with either the possibility of the articles being true if contextualised in one way, or false, if contextualised in another; rather their tentativeness consists in their remaining logically ambiguous, and it is their logical ambiguity which preserves the purity of the mystery of God's revelation. But to see refuge in such logical ambiguity is an attempt to evade the issue of the truth or falsity of the 'Anglican Attitude'; it makes this attitude infallible and invulnerable to falsification; but it also hides the possibility of God's revelation. Because if what I say about God is logically ambiguous, I cannot be

mistaken about the nature of God's revelation; but this vulnerability is bought at the price of not being able to say anything coherent at all about the mystery we call God. Leslie Stephen's words about Maurice fit Ramsey's position over the Articles equally well. He is 'muddle headed.....futile.....utterly bewilding'.[48]

48. On Being Sure in Religion; p.50

CHAPTER FIVE

VERIFICATION: THIS WORLD OR THE NEXT

1. Faith as Non-Propositional:

John Hick in Faith and Knowledge[1] and other writings on the same topic, claims that the uniform epistemological character of faith can be laid bare; to know God is not to hold or believe in a series of propositions such as 'God is the Father of mankind', or 'Jesus Christ is the son of God'; to know God is to experience Him in a way epistemologically similar to the way I experience a table or a cat. Admittedly, the objects of experience in the two cases, e.g. God and a cat, are described by statements which are of logically different types, but the way the knower knows the two objects is identical. The major and the minor prophets of the Old Testament, the Apostles, and Christ himself, did not, Hick thinks, believe in a set of propositions about God; they experienced for themselves the God the living and the true. Hick writes: "Instead of assimilating faith to propositional belief whether such a belief be produced by reasoning or an act of will, or both - we must assimilate it to perception. I therefore want to explore the possibility that the cognition of God by faith is more like perceiving something, even perceiving a physical object, that is present before us than it is like believing a statement about some absent object, whether the statement has been proved to us or because we want to believe it."[2]

I wish to raise two questions about Hick's identification of faith with some sort of immediate experience of God. Firstly, is his neat classification of Aquinas' views about revelation as solely propositional adequate?[3] Secondly, can experience which contains no propositional or

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1. Faith and Knowledge; 2nd ed. 1967
2. John Hick; "Religious faith as 'experiencing as'" in Royal Institute of Philosophy lectures. Vol. II 1967-68 Talk of God, p.21
3. In Faith and Knowledge:Chapter 1, passim

cognitive element provide an adequate phenomenology of what is said and done in the full range of Christian belief and worship?

The only section of the Summa Theologica Hick quotes and discusses is Part II.II. Question 1. ff. Here Aquinas writes "Accordingly the object of faith may be considered in two ways. First as regards the thing itself which is believed, and thus the object of faith is something simple, namely the thing about which we have faith. Secondly, on the part of the believer, and in this respect the object of faith is something complex by way of a proposition."[4]

Here, Aquinas is undoubtedly saying that faith in this life involves believing in propositions: but does it follow from this as Hick seems to imply, that for Aquinas faith is restricted to, and is never anything over and above the acceptance of propositions? I think that Hick is following the popular Roman interpretation of what Aquinas says rather than looking to see what Aquinas actually wrote. Just as the popular Roman interpretation of the Quinquae viae suppose that these arguments provide demonstrative proofs of God's existence, so the popular teaching about Aquinas on faith suggests that he restricts faith to nothing but the acceptance of a set of propositions. I think that Aquinas is rather saying that because our knowledge of God in this life, is never and in the nature of the case, can never be complete, faith, if it is to be cognitive, requires both a propositional and an experiential aspect. Firstly, it is nonsense to say that the only model of faith for Aquinas is assent to propositions. There is a certain amount of common ground between Aquinas, and Protestant thinkers such as Kierkegaard, Brunner and Barth: they all insist that the New Testament doctrine of faith consists in obedience to what is divinely given, and therefore faith itself is a gift of God, and can never be identified with human nature, or any element

4. Summa Theologica: Part II.II Question 1. English Dominican Translation 1901. p.6

of it, not even propositions. Thus: "We are directed by the help of divine grace to our ultimate end. But the ultimate end is an open vision of the First Truth in Itself. .....therefore before it comes to this and man's intellect must be subject to God by way of belief, under the influence of divine grace which accomplishesthis."[5]

Secondly, Aquinas makes clear that assent to propositions is only one of the elements in faith. God is in the end 'the Unknown', and so transcends any propositions which may be used to describe His nature. Thus Aquinas claimed: "This is the ultimate in human knowledge of God: to know that we do not know Him"[6] But further, in the Summa Theologica, he makes the point explicitly that revelation of God's mystery is conveyed to us by means of our sense experience. For,"Holy Scripture fittingly delivers Divine and spiritual realities under bodily guises. For God provides for all things according to the kind of things they are. Now we are of the kind to reach the world the world of intelligence through the world of sense, since all our knowledge takes its rise from sensation. Congenially, then, Holy Scripture delivers spiritual things to us beneath the metaphor of bodily things.[7]

Thirdly, for Aquinas faith is primarily adhesion to God Himself, inasmuch as He discloses Himself to us. Therefore in this sense faith is an immediate and personal knowing of God. "Since man can only know the things he does not see himself by taking them from another who does see them, and since faith is among the things we do not see, the knowledge of objects of faith must be handed on by one who sees them himself. Now this one is God, who perfectly comprehends Himself, and naturally sees his essence. Indeed we get faith from God,"[8]

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5. Summa Contra Gentiles, Book III Chapter 152 Trans. Vernon J. Bourke, Image Books, pp.236-237
6. Quaestiones Disputatae de Potentia Dei 7, 5, Ad.14
7. Summa Theologica; I.I.9. New Dominican Trans. pp.33 and 35
8. Summa Contra Gentiles: Book III, Chapter 154 Trans. Vernon J. Bourke, Image Books, p.239

Hick arrives at the conclusion that we can only have knowledge of God by experience by putting forward a dilemma: God can be known either by perceiving His presence or because He is an inferred entity. God is obviously not an inferred entity in the same way that sub-atomic particles are inferred entities; therefore knowledge of God can be by experience and is never the result of an inference.[9] But does this neat and compressed argument prove that we can know God only by having some sort of experience, and that any indirect inferential knowledge of God is always illicit?

Why should there be one and only one way to get to know God in this life? The phrase 'knowing God' seems to have a variety of divergent uses: I know God through the record of His revelation to and through the prophets, apostles and martyrs; I know God in Christ Jesus; I know God in His presence in the eucharist; I know God in the works of His creation. In all these instances and many others, I can claim that I 'know' God; but the various uses of 'know' cannot be identified with my 'experiencing' God and nothing else.

Consider the statement that Jesus died on the cross in A.D.33. This statement is central to the Christian belief that Christ opened the way for the possibility of man's salvation by his atoning death on the cross. No death on the cross, no atonement. But do I know the historical statement that Jesus died on the cross in A.D.33 by 'experience'? It is true that someone must have once experienced Christ dying on the cross, or thought they had, and then recorded it in oral, written, or perhaps pictorial form, so that the information has been conveyed to me here and now. But I do not, and in the nature of the case cannot experience Christ being crucified, in the way I can feel pain at listening to John Strainer's 'Crucifixion', or the pleasure of listening to J.S. Bach's

9. John Baillie in Our Knowledge of God, demolishes the theistic proofs by means of a similar argument.

'St. Matthew passion'. My experience of the crucifixion is not immediate, and because the New Testament documents are written records I can know of the crucifixion by means of propositions. It is a contingent fact that the record of the crucifixion is propositional: it might have been straightforwardly pictorial, or it could have been conveyed by means of some musical 'description'.

The statement 'Christ died for me on the cross around 33 A.D.' is not a straightforward historical statement. It is an autobiographical statement describing what I think Christ's death on the cross has done for me. The statement presupposes the historical truth of the proposition, 'Christ died on the cross', but it also describes part of my experience. I am claiming that this death was different from any other crucifixion in the same year; other crucifixions may have been recorded or not; the records may have been kept or lost. But Christ's death is claimed to have significance for my present experience. This statement describing my present experience of Christ is of a different type from that recording historical events about Christ's early life. But it does presuppose a record of the historical event of Christ's death; and that record is stated in propositions.

To take another example, Hick is quite correct in asserting that Isaiah's inaugural vision (Isaiah 6) was a matter of what Isaiah saw, heard, and felt. (Thus Isaiah writes, 'I saw the Lord sitting on a throne' ...'I heard the voice of the Lord'...etc.) In order to be communicated the vision was described in propositions. And granted the fact that Isaiah wrote a book about his vision and did not describe it in pictorial or other form, if I am to come to know the God to which the Old Testament bears witness, I must read the propositions Isaiah wrote, and re-interpret them in terms of how I can come to experience God. Isaiah's experience

cannot be communicated to me as a sort of pure experience independently of some form of communication.

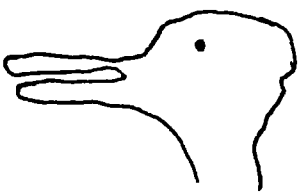
Propositions then, were as a matter of fact used to communicate God's revelation in the Old and New Testaments.

There do seem to be some uses of the word 'know' in which what is known is not something directly experienced in the sense that I am now directly experiencing a white blue, and yet is not an inferred entity either. I know that in 1917 the Bolsheviks staged a revolution in Russia, but I did not experience the revolution in the way for example, I experienced the Cuban revolution. In the latter case, I saw pictures in the paper and on television, and I heard and read news reports and so on. Again I did not experience the Cuban revolution in the way I have experienced the student revolution in Durham, in 1968. In this case, I saw the 'Sit In' in Old Shire Hall.

In other words, there is not an impassible gulf between inferred entities on the one hand and experience on the other: Such a rigid distinction between the two cannot be upheld. The two extremes of sub-atomic particles and my seeing a red patch now are distinct, but 'experience' and entities supposedly inferred from such experience tend to become fairly inseparable, in knowledge of the past, in knowledge of concepts, and in knowledge of the future. But Hick confuses his whole analysis by pretending that 'experience' and entities inferred from experience are totally distinct and separate, and then extending his first use of the word 'experience' to cover what is not in any sense neat experience.

Hick claims that there is no difference in principle between learning to recognise a fork and learning to recognise God. He writes: "I shall try to show while the object of religious knowledge is unique, its basic

epistemological pattern is that of all our knowing."[10] The great difficulty is to discover what exactly Hick means by experiencing a fork. To elucidate his belief that concepts are dispositional capacities, Hick uses examples drawn from Wittgenstein's discussion of 'seeing as ' in the Philosophical Investigations.[11] Jastrow's duck-rabbit can be seen as either the head of a duck or the head of a rabbit.



Wittgenstein argues that in the case of puzzle pictures the interpretation of the lines and marks on the paper is not an additional fact about the picture. The person who can distinguish nothing in the above diagram, sees the same lines and marks as the person who can see it as a duck, or as a rabbit, or as both of these. The 'seeing as' element in the perception of the puzzle pictures, adds no additional fact, and is not produced by any additional fact in the puzzle picture. Thus Wittgenstein writes: "..... but what I perceive in the dawning of an aspect is not a property of an object, but an internal relation between it and other objects."[12]

As applied to puzzle pictures, these points are quite acceptable and unexceptionable. Hick, however, extends the notion of 'seeing as' in Two ways.

Firstly, he extends the notion of 'seeing as' to that of 'experiencing as'. Just as I can see this desk as a motor car if I look at it from a certain angle, so I can hear the sound of my cat mewing as the whistle of my best friend, or smell the decaying of old fish as the fermenting of beer. The sense of sight has no monopoly in providing information about the external world, and I think Hick is quite justified in extending the idea of 'seeing as' to the other senses.

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10. Faith and Knowledge, p.97
11. Part II, Section XI
12. Philosophical Investigations; Part II p.212e

Secondly, Hick suggests that "all seeing is 'seeing as'" and "all experiencing is 'experiencing as'". Hick asserts: "The next point to be introduced will considerably affect the upshot of what has gone before. This is the thesis that all experiencing is experiencing-as..... not only, for example, seeing the tuft of grass, erroneously, as a rabbit, but also seeing it correctly as a tuft of grass."[13] But can all experiencing meaningfully be regarded as experiencing-as?

Hick admits that it is necessary todraw the distinction between objects which we experience as something other than they are, (e.g. a tuft of grass as a rabbit), and objects we experience as what we normally describe them as being (e.g. experience a tuft of grass as a tuft of grass). There is a type distinction between these two cases. In the first case, (i.e. when I experience a tuft of grass as a rabbit), there are two possibilities: (a) I may be deceived by the appearance and believe that there is a rabbit where there is only a tuft of grass; (b) I may know that the tuft of grass is not really a rabbit, but see the likeness of a rabbit in its appearance. Both these instances differ from my seeing the tuft of grass as what it is, a tuft of grass.

It is hard to see what Hick gains by his linguistic recommendation that we begin to regard all experiencing as 'experiencing as'. If everything we experience is 'experienced as' then it will be necessary to introduce further terminology to distinguish those 'experiencing as' situations in which something is 'experienced as' other than it is, from those situations in which something is 'experienced as' what it actually is. The linguistic recommendation only generates a more complicated terminology than the terminology it is recommended to replace. Hick certainly seems to be misinterpreting Wittgenstein in making 'experiencing

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13. Op. cit. Talk of God; p.24

as' do the job which the word experiencing normally does. Wittgenstein was quite categorical: "Seeing as...' is not part of perception. And for that reason it is like seeing and again not like."[14]

What is Hick trying to do with the notion of experience? He is trying as I indicated earlier, to divorce 'experience' from any propositional element, or element of judgement. To experience X is no guarantee that I will logically be able to judge that X or state that X. But if the possibility about making a judgement about an experience is removed, is not the possibility of my saying that a given experience is true or false also removed? Despite his claims to be an empiricist, Hick seems to be attempting to make the paradigm of experience, those experiences which can neither be said to be true or false, veridical or non-veridical. Thus, "Faith is an uncompelled mode of 'experiencing as'.. experiencing the world as a place in which we have to do at all times with the transcendent God; and the propositional belief to which it gives rise is correspondingly non-coercive in that it is not only presently unverifiable but also unable to be supported by arguments of probability."[15] But if faith is the result of some sort of experience which is neither verifiable nor falsifiable in this life, what logical status does it have? Is the experience which faith gives us of the same status as my seeing a patch of red? The statement 'I see red now' may be incorrigible, but it has to buy this incorrigibility at the price of being uninformative about the world. Hick tells us that "for the believer faith is not probability but a certainty."[16] We are never told, however, what sort of certainty faith gives us, and it very much looks as though it is that type of certainty in which problems of ontology are submerged in some sort of self-authenticating epistemology.

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14. Philosophical Investigations: Pt. II, p.197e
15. Faith and Knowledge; p.151
16. Op. cit. p.53

This assimilation of experiencing to 'experiencing as' is matched in its obscurity by Hick's exposition of the theory that concepts are dispositional capacities. He is quite correct, I think, to follow Wittgenstein, Ryle, and Price in affirming that there is not necessarily some sort of ghostly mental activity going on, every time I recognise an object, or perform an action. I don't need to put every action I do into a propositional form in my mind before I perform it. When I want to turn my car to the right, I don't need to utter in my head the Highway Code formula, "Mirror-signal-manoeuvre", before turning right. Knowing what to do in this instance is being able to perform the necessary actions correctly. Similarly, in recognising a pre-1958-Morris Minor, I don't need to perform an intellectual somersault, and run through the details in my mind of what such a car looks like, before I do the recognising. If I did, I would need to perform a second order intellectual act in order to recognise the first one, and so on ad infinitum. If questioned as to how I know that this car is a pre-1958 Morris Minor, I can reply, because it has a flat radiator grill, a windscreen divided into two halves, a solid chassis, and so on. A thorough check of my act of recognition does involve the drawing up of this type of list. But my initial recognition is not an intellectual list making of this sort.

Hick seems to me correct in affirming that recognising and thinking are not ghostly replicas of experiencing and sensing; and I do not wish to deny the value of his dispositional analysis of knowing God. But he is wrong in supposing that sensing and experiencing are in no way connected with judging, and the use of propositions. As in the case discussed above of 'experiencing as', Hick here also seems to wish to place whatever we do when we recognise and experience, beyond the range of cognitive empirical checking, safely out of the way of the

dangers of the demand for verification or falsification.

There is practically no discussion in Hick of problems about misrecognising, and 'mis-experiencing as'. The fact that concepts are recognitional capacities, provides no guarantee that I use the concepts I have learnt correctly. For example, when C.S. Lewis's book A Grief Observed first came out, I misrecognised the title, (despite the fact that I read the book from cover to cover) as A Grief Obscured. Everytime I looked at the cover of the book, because I expected to see the words of the title I had invented, I saw that title and not the correct one. This mis-recognition went on for several weeks, until, when I discussed the book with a friend, my mistake was pointed out. Hick seems to be attempting to produce a theory of how we experience or recognise which at one and the same time avoids the appeal for verification, and is still sturdy enough to provide us with knowledge about nature, man and God.

The description which Hick provides of the processes by means of which we acquire religious belief may or may not be correct. But the truth content of a given set of religious beliefs is not specified by means of such a phenomenology. To say all concepts are recognitional capacities, does not tell me which concepts are instantiated and which are not. The fact that in seeing my desk, I see my desk, and not a proposition or set of propositions, does not mean that judgement and experience are two separate and totally unrelated things. As G.N.A. Vesey put it: "The look of things is something phenomenal, not intellectual. This is not to deny that experience and judgement are connected; for what an object looks like to a person is what he would judge that object to be if he had reason to judge otherwise."[17]

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17. "Seeing and seeing as;" Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society 1955-56

Hick attempts to strip recongition of its propositional, and intellectual elements, and leaves it as a non-cognitive act. In Thinking and Experience,[18] H.H. Price distinguishes between the recognition of individuals, and the recognition of characteristics. Individuals are such things as tables, cats and men, etc. Characteristics are blueness, heaviness, hardness, etc. Price regards the recognition of the characteristics as in some sense fundamental, in that the recognition of the individual is in the end, dependent on the recognition of the characteristic. There is a sense in which the recognition of the individual is inferred from that of the characteristics; yet inferred is not quite the right word. There is no formal and or conscious process of inference, but rather an 'all at once character' of secondary recognition. But Price claims "secondary recognition is always subject to verification (that is how its fallibility is discovered) and in this respect it really does resemble inductive inference."[19]

Hick seems to want to get rid of this appeal for verification at an ordinary empirical level in this world, in order that he can introduce his 'eschatological verification' at a later stage.

Hick's claim that there is "no difference in principle between learning to recognise a fork and learning to recognise acts of God,"[20] falls to pieces at this point. If I recognise that this is a fork, I can also verify that this is a fork here and now. But for Hick this is not true of my recognition of God, because I have to wait until I die before I can verify that He is God. It is not accidental that the notions of verification and falsification are hardly mentioned in Hick's discussion

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18. Chapter 2.

19. Thinking and Experience: p.51

20. Notes on Hick's lectures, Cambridge 1967

of our knowledge of forks, rabbits and tufts of grass. But if our acts of knowing material objects, and our acts of knowing God are to be shown to be epistemologically similar, then either there must be some verification procedure at least in principle for verifying there is a God here and now, or ordinary material objects which we know and recognise must not be verifiable in principle in this life. Hick takes the latter course, despite its utter counter-empirical emphasis.

A further puzzling feature of Hick's phenomenology of religious belief is his use of the puzzle picture examples. The religious interpretation of the universe is regarded rather like Jastrow's duck-rabbit puzzle picture in the sense that just as both interpretations of the puzzle picture are equally valid, so the theistic or atheistic interpretations of the universe are equally valid. But why is only one type of puzzle picture, the totally ambiguous one, suitable as the model for the religious interpretation of the universe? Further, if the duck-rabbit is the correct model for religious epistemology, can I be said to know of God and to know of a fork in the same way? A fork is not ambiguously a fork and something else at one and the same time.

The puzzle picture analogy is illustrated by the parable of two men on a road, one of whom thinks that the road is just "one damn'd thing after another", yet the other thinks it is a road to the celestial city. Life "in via" has this total ambiguity: only when they come to their journey's end will they discover which guess at the way the road went was correct. Here Hick seems to be taking up the position of a hypothetical impartial observer; if Hick's phenomenological analysis of religious belief is correct, then there is no rational way of choosing between the Christian and non-Christian view of the universe. But as Hick recognises, both Christians and non-Christians do claim to know that their beliefs are

true. Bur further, Hick claims that he knows Christianity is true: "For to the believer faith is not a possibility but a certainty."[21] The initial scepticism about the Christian interpretation of life is not genuine. The use of the puzzle picture analogy as a model for religious belief does not in the end help to evade issues of truth and falsity. Even within the puzzle picture universe of discourse, some interpretations of the puzzle picture are correct, others are incorrect. I can interpret the duck-rabbit as a duck, or as a rabbit, or as both, but it would certainly be wrong to interpret it as an elephant, or as a kangaroo. But Hick offers no criteria for distinguishing the correct interpretations of puzzle pictures from incorrect ones. To quote G.N.A. Vesey again "To say 'all seeing is 'seeing as',' is to say that perceptions like judgements are either true or false..... they are true when what the object looks like to somebody is what the object is."[22]

2. The Impossibility of Alogical Probability:

Most of what Hick has to say about the impossibility of applying the notion of probability to the universe as a whole, I am in full agreement with. But one of his arguments[23] seems to make impossible any type of Christian apologetic, in this life, or in any other. In discussing F.R. Tennant's two volumned work on Philosophical Theology, he writes "The standard naturalistic theories do indeed display serious inconsistencies and inadequacies under examination, and these can be exposed by arguments which are as valid for the unbeliever as for the religious believer. But in the constructive apologetic, the method changes, overtly or covertly, from impersonal demonstration to personal persuasion, from argument to recommendation. For there are no common scales in which to

21. Faith and Knowledge; p.53

22. Seeing and seeing as; Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society 1955-56, p.114

23. Faith and Knowledge: Chapter 7

measure, for example, the evidential weight of apparent universal mechanism against that of the impact of Christ upon his disciples. There is no objective measuring rod by which to compare the depth to which wickedness can sink with the height to which goodness can rise, and so to balance the problem of evil which challenges theism, against the problem of good which challenges naturalism. Looked at in a completely neutral light, and through the spectacles of no philosophy, the face of the world would present a checkboard of alternative black and white. It can be seen either as white diversified by black - a divinely ruled world containing accidental pockets of evil; or as black diversified by white - a godless world containing the incongruous factor of moral goodness"[24]

This is an interesting argument, but if it is correct two moves Hick might want to make are ruled out. Firstly, it makes an Irenaean type of theodicy in this life logically impossible, because I cannot weigh the value of soul making against the existence of the vast amount of evil there is in the world. Secondly, if I logically cannot weigh the existence of evil against the fact of Christ and so on in this life, it will not be logically possible in an eschatological world either. Now what God is like is presumably determined in part by what he is allowing to happen in this world here and now. But if I can never weigh up these incomensurables, I can never know in an after-life whether the being before me, whom others worship, is an all loving God, or nothing but a devil.

Hick gets round my first pount by doing at a level of theodicy what in Faith and Knowledge he does at the level of epistemology: he places the resolution of the problem of suffering in an after-life, and not in this one. Thus: "If there is any eventual resolution of the interplay

24. Faith and Knowledge: pp.155 - 156

between good and evil, any decisive bringing of good out of evil, it must lie beyond this world and beyond the enigma of death."[25] This invulnerability of belief in this world can be brought only at a high price: "Experienced from within stresses of human existence, evil is a sheerly malevolent reality, hostile alike to God and His creation."[26] Just as in the case of epistemology in this life, the evidence is equally in favour of the theist and the atheist, so in the case of theodicy the evidence for and against the existence of a loving God is totally ambiguous.

In the same paragraph as the latter passage however, Hick writes: "Seen..... in the perspective of a living faith in the reality of a great, on-going, divine purpose which enfolds all time and all history, evil has no status in virtue of which it might threaten even God Himself. ..... neither its beginning, its course, nor its end lies outside God's ultimate control."[27] But, if I can see the resolution of the problem of evil in the after-life only, how can I assert anything about God's ultimate purpose for, or control of the world from the standpoint in which I am placed in this life? Hick's claim that in this life we don't know God because of the ambiguity of the evidence, again turns out to be a sham.

Hick's thodicy does presuppose, nevertheless, that when I die and live with my resurrection body, I will see that God's ultimate purpose, not only for me, but for the whole of mankind was and is good. But this presupposes that in the after-life I can weigh the pros and cons for and against God's goodness. If I cannot see whether or not the fact of Christ outweighs the problem of evil and so on, my after-life experience of religion will remain as systematically ambiguous as it is at present. If the pieces of evidence against and in favour of God's goodness are in

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25. Evil and the God of Love; p.375
26. Evil and the God of Love; p.395
27. Evil and the God of Love; p.395

principle incommensurable as Hick suggests, then no theodicy is ever possible, and cognitive knowledge of God is logically impossible, in the present and in the hereafter. But if evidence can be weighed in the after-life, why is it in principle impossible that some of the weighing should be done in this life?

People as a matter of fact can and do weigh the evidences for and against the existence of a good God against each other. The existence of the weighing process is no guarantee that it is logically justifiable. Hick however, seems to suppose that unless there is a strict objective means of measuring the existence of evil against the fact of Christ and so on, no sort of measurement is possible. But consider the utilitarian system of ethics. In this ethical system, there is no strict and rigid measuring rod by means of which I can measure the pleasure I can get from a short sharp tickle, against that which I get from a lethargic throbbing tranquillity. Or more seriously there is no metre rod provided for me to measure whether the telling of lies will cause more unhappiness for the greatest number, than telling the truth. Most human beings are utilitarians some of the time, and we manage to make rule of thumb calculations about what the greatest happiness of the greatest number will be, without there being any need for what Hick would call a strict objective measure. Likewise in the case of Hick's scales, people can and do in their own consideration of their religious beliefs compare the fact of Christ with the existence of evil. Hick has a point in suggesting that any system of weighing we employ in this world will always be provisional and incomplete: but it is better to use inadequate tools, when they are the only tools we have got, than no tools at all.

3. The Three Decker Universe:

'Experiencing as' is not just a chance recognition of individual phenomena. What we 'experience' can, Hick suggests, be divided into three distinct but interrelated areas: the natural, the moral and the religious. In each of the three spheres I come to know about the material world, morals of religion by the same epistemological process; that of 'experiencing as'. The three spheres are not distinct and separate, but interpenetrate each other. Hick claims that the natural aspects of our environment are the most basic, they force themselves on us whether we want to believe in them or not. I cannot help but believe except when for a few minutes I play the part of a sceptical philosopher, that there is a room in which I spend most of my waking life, and that in it are a desk, bed, chairs, and many books. The moral aspects of our environment presuppose the natural, in that moral action always occurs so far as we know, within and through the natural world. I have relative freedom in the moral sphere, in that I can choose whether I want to steal or to be honest, to murder or to live at peace with my neighbours. If I am to live in a society of any sort, I have to adopt some moral code, however rudimentary, even if it is only to preserve honour among thieves. In the religious sphere which presupposes both the moral and the natural, freedom is the greatest. I can accept or reject God as I see fit. Hick argues: "Has this epistemological paradigm - of one order of significance superimposed upon and mediated through another - any further application? The contention of this chapter is that it has. As ethical significance interpenetrates natural significance, so religious significance interpenetrates both ethical and natural. The divine is the highest and ultimate order of significance, mediating neither of the others, and yet being mediated through both of them."[28]

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28. Faith and Knowledge; p.113

What does Hick mean by the metaphor 'interpenetrate'? What exactly are the relations between the three levels; the natural, the moral, and the religious? To say that 'interpenetrate' each other without unpacking what the word means is to say nothing. What, if any, are the logical relations between statements about the moral and the natural spheres? What are the logical relations between statements about the moral and the natural spheres, and statements should the religious spheres? Hick offers no answer to these questions; but if the claim that all the three spheres are in fact known in the same way is to be anything more than a statement about our psychology, isn't it necessary to have at least some knowledge of how statements about the three spheres are logically related?

But granted that it is the case that the religious, the moral and the natural aspects of our experience do have a common epistemology, how do we know that the concepts we have been taught to use in each of these three spheres do in fact refer to something actual. Even if we grant that in the natural and the moral sphere we have developed a set of concepts which we know how to apply reasonably correctly, yet the concepts are becoming progressively more and more general as we pass from the natural to the moral and then on to the religious, and is there any guarantee that by the time we reach the religious sphere the concepts have not become so general that they cease to have meaningful application? I know what it is like to see a table; I also know what it is like to 'see' stealing is wrong; I do not know nearly so clearly what it means to say that I 'see' God. At this more general level of recognition Hick still seems to evade the issue of how I can distinguish recognition from misrecognition. As I stressed earlier, I can be taught a whole series of coherent concepts, e.g. Medieval views about Witchcraft, which we know now don't apply to

anything. How, on Hick's analysis, do we know that the Christian conceptual system describing God is not in a similar position?

4. Eschatological Verification:

Hick seems determined to put all his eggs in one basket; any possible solution both to problems about the verification of religious belief, and to problems of theodicy can, logically, be solved only in some after-life.

The theory of eschatological verification takes the final step in the attempt to reduce ontology to psychology. The logical and psychological factors involved in verification and falsification are inseparable. That X has been verified or falsified, means that X has been verified or falsified by someone. "I suggest that 'verify' be construed as a verb which has its primary uses in the active voice: I verify, you verify, we verify, they verify, or have verified. The impersonal passive, it is verified, now becomes logically secondary."[29] If meaning is identified with the possibility of verification, this statement will lead to phenomenalism of a very radical kind, and make the process of verification and falsification largely mind-dependent. Surely, it is perfectly meaningful to say 'there is a stone on Mars which no living person will ever see.' Further, it is meaningful to claim that 'there is a stone on Mars which no human being could possibly see'; e.g. in the sense that there may be so many stones on Mars that even all the human beings who eventually land on Mars all working together could not see every stone. These two statements are verifiable in principle however, in the sense that we know what it is like to see a stone, and by analogy can postulate what it would be like to see any given stone on Mars.

Hick attempts to get round the charges that theological statements are not meaningful because they are not verifiable in principle, by suggesting that in one sense they are. Although we cannot, because of

29. Faith and Knowledge: pp.170 - 171

God's being God, 'see' God in this life, in an after-life we can expect to be confronted face to face with God, or at least with God as revealed in Christ Jesus. The possibility of such a confrontation tells us what it is like to verify in principle the statement 'there is a God' But is some sort of verification in an after-life a genuine suggestion about verification in principle?

Suppose someone says,'I believe the surface of Pluto consists of rock and stone.' This statement is verifiable in principle, in that we know what it would be like to land a space ship on Pluto, and to send back television pictures from Pluto, and eventually for the men to return in their space ship. The problem about verification in principle, is that it is an after-life, and not in this life. In an after-life, there is notsending back of television pictures, no return to earth for the weary travellers. I do not think verification in principle can be extended to apply to an afterlife the nature of which we cannot specify clearly, but which might not exist. In the case of Pluto, we can at least verify that there is such a planet in which to look for stones; we cannot verify that there is an after-life in which we are to look for God.

Hick does offer some suggestions as to what the after-life may be like. He suggests the analogy of a man in Princeton who suddenly finds himself in Australia with the same body, the same memory contents and the same remains in his stomach as the man who disappeared in Princeton. But isn't part of what we mean by saying someone is the 'same' person that this being lives in space and time in a certain way. Hick appeals to ordinary language and asserts that if persons habitually changed inexplicably from place to place, or from this world to the next world, then our use of the word 'person', and the word 'same' would become enlarged in such a way that we would say that a person who at one moment is in Princeton, and who at the next moment is in Sydney, would be referred to as the 'same' person. This claim about the development of ordinary

language in this situation may be true; but only experience of such a situation can show that it is true. But the language change might go against Hick. If frequent changes of place occurred to persons we might decide to give them a new proper name every time such a change occurred.

A difficulty which Hick acknowledges in his position is that even if we do survive death, the evidence for and against the existence of God may be as systematically ambiguous as it is in this life. My awareness of having survived death, in and by itself, provides evidence for the statement that there is life after death, but it provides no evidence for the existence of God. Saying what would verify the statement 'Gos exists' in some hypothetical after-life is as hard as making a similar specification in this life. The problem is just pushed one stage further back.

It is easy enough to assert a somewhat superficial summary of St. Paul's view in I Corinthians that in this life we have a material body, and in some future state we will have a resurrection body. But if the resurrection body is to be a means of verifying God's existence, I must know in some detail what it is like, and how it perceives what it perceives. Suppose that the resurrection body could perceive nothing but its own states of self-consciousness, the self being distinguished from the not self, by the memory of there having been a self.... non-self distinction in the material world. In such a situation I could know nothing except (i) that I once existed in the material world; (ii) now I exist, but can only remember what I once experienced, but can no longer experience any new data.[30] Even if we grant that a 'resurrection' body in some sense identifies and re-bdentifies 'resurrection'mobjects as things other than itself, the problem still

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30. See an analogous suggestion for a disembodied, as distinct from an embodied self in P.F. Strawson; Individuals; pp.115 - 116

remains, what evidence would verify or falsify God's existence in this state? This is a question to which Hick seems prepared to offer no serious answer.

I think that Hick cannot escape the charge of circularity of argument. I think Kai Nielsen stresses the wrong point in saying that the circularity occurs when Hick suggests that God's existence in the after-life would be verified if (a) we saw the completion of God's purpose as disclosed in Jesus Christ in the New Testament; (b) an eschatological confirmation of Jesus and hence of his revelation of God[31] Surely, Hick's argument becomes circular at the point at which he starts discussing Paul's notion of a 'resurrection' body. The resurrection of the body is not something according to Paul which we achieve for ourselves, or do by our own cleverness or ingenuity. God raises us from the dead by His own gracious act, as He raised Christ from the dead. "But some one will ask 'How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?' You foolish man. What you sow does not come to life unless it does. ....But God gives it a body as He has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. ... But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."[32] If, however, it is God's gracious action which raises us into a resurrection body, no part of this process can be appealed to as evidence in principle for the existence of God, without obvious circularity.

5. Two Uses of the Phrase 'to know' in Hick's Epistemology of Religion:

Hick claims: "It is not being denied here that the religious man already enjoys a genuine knowledge of God; it is not being suggested that he has to wait until after death to find with certainty whether God exists."[33] I wish to argue that the major problem in Hick's epistemology of religious belief is that I am said to 'know' God in this

31. Nielsen: Canadian Journal of Theology, XVIII No. 4 1960
Also Hick: pp.196 ff. in Faith and Knowledge

32. I Corinthians 15 v.35 + 36; 38, 57

33. Faith and Knowledge p.193

life in a logically different sort of way from the way I am said to 'know' God in the life hereafter.

Hick is making a valid theological point in his statement of his theory of eschatological verification. This point that my knowledge of God in this life is always and can only be provisional: or knowledge of God will only start to become complete when in the after-life faith is changed into sight.

I wish to take issue with Hick when he claims that our partial knowledge of God in this life is of a logically different order from our knowledge of Him hereafter. Our knowledge of God in the present, and in any future life we may live to experience, is of logically the same type. Although Hick probably does not intend this to be the case, his analysis of our knowledge of God in this life seems in the end to be non-cognitive. This is shown by his repeated refusal to describe the criteria for distinguishing between 'experiencing as' and 'mis-experiencing as', between recognising and misrecognising. His refusal to allow what Price refers to as 'secondary identification', seems to force him to place the basic data of religious experience on the same logical level as that of sense data. I cannot doubt that I see a red blue, but this incorrigibility is bought at the price of this experience being unable to tell me anything about the outside world. Hick shows a desire to produce a set of basic experiences of religious awareness, which are beyond the pale of doubt and falsification, and yet on which can be built the whole complicated framework of Christian theology and worship. Hick attempts in fact, to prise apart experience from judgement, concept recognition from concept verification.

Faith and Knowledge looks like an attempt to invert the popular notion of Aquinas' views on religious belief.[34] The crude popular

34. Cf. pp.15 cf. above

interpretation of Aquinas asserts that faith in propositions is the only sort of faith we can reach up to in this life; only in an after-life do we experience God. Hick comes very close to asserting that we have to wait until the after-life to have propositional and therefore cognitive knowledge of God; in this life all we can get is 'experiencing as'. Therefore, despite explicit denial, he produces a perfect example of an infallibilist theory of knowledge.[35] We can really know God only when we find ourselves in an after-life: but this is putting us in a position where we cannot be mistaken.

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35. Cf. Faith and Knowledge: Chapter 9, p.200, passim

PART IV.

FAITH AND THE RETREAT FROM HISTORY.

CHAPTER SIX

FAITH AND THE RETREAT FROM HISTORY

One of the most striking features of twentieth century Protestant dogmatics is the tendency to retreat on all fronts from any possible test of verification or falsification. Traditionally Christian apologists of all denominations have defended their faith on the ground that Christianity is a historical religion. By this claim was usually meant that the truth or falsity of the Christian religion depended on whether or not Jesus lived at a certain time in the past, and whether or not he said and did certain things which the gospels and epistles record him as saying and doing. Thus Luther is reputed to have rejected Zwingli's belief that the bread and the wine in the eucharist are "bare signs", on the ground that the gospels record that Jesus said over the bread at the last supper, "this is my body", and not "this bread is a bare sign for my body". Clearly, if Christ never said "this is my body" over the bread, Luther's appeal to Christ's authority falls to the ground. To take another example, most Christians believe that in some sense Christ died on the cross for the sins of the world. Many Moslems however, believe that Jesus never died on the cross; that some substitute was found for him at the last minute. Now clearly whether the Moslems or Christians are right is a matter of history, and can in principle be settled by critical historical methods. If there is sufficient evidence that Christ died on the cross, then the Moslem claim is mistaken. If there is good evidence to suggest that Christ never died on a cross, then the Christian claim is obviously false. If there is insufficient evidence either way, then we can do nothing but remain agnostic.

The problems presented by the claim that Christianity is a

historical religion, does not differ in type from the claim Julius Caesar actually lived, or that Hitler sang "Rule Britannia" and then committed suicide. The truth or falsity of these statements depends on the historical evidence in favour of them or against them. Historians however, are not agreed among themselves about the correct analysis of how our knowledge of the past is possible. It is therefore necessary to examine the more important philosophical discussions of how our knowledge of the past is possible. Then it will be easier to examine how far some Protestant theologians are justified in heavily reducing the importance many traditional Christian apologists attached to the claim that Christianity is a historical religion.

1. The problem

Is there a problem about our knowledge of past events? At first sight we seem to know beyond doubt, that Thales correctly predicted an eclipse of the sun for the year 585 B.C., or that one of the causes of the French Revolution was the failure of Louis XVI to introduce moderate reforms quickly and decisively, or that one of the causes of Mackonochie's illness in his later life was his repeated persecution whilst he was Vicar of St. Alban's Holborn by the Church Association. Yet when we question how we know the truth of these claims with such certainty, our knowledge seems to dissolve into opinion.

The grounds for scepticism about our knowledge of past events is clear: I cannot know the events of the past in the same way that I can remember having an appendicitus when I was ten. It is true, empirically, that I was not alive at the time when the French revolution occurred. It is logically true that I cannot remember what as a matter of fact I was not in a position to perceive: to remember is in the nature of the case to remember something that I have experienced. How then, do I know of the occurrence of events which I neither experienced for myself, nor

know anyone who was alive and can retell their experiences of the relevant events to me?

The sceptical charge is thus that there is a logical gap between the evidence for past events and the past events themselves. This scepticism is of a similar sort to that which occurs for those who hold the sense-data theory of perception: if all I can ever perceive directly are sense-data, how can I ever know that there are any such things as material objects, let alone what they are like? Similarly in the case of events in the past, if all I can ever know about past events is the present evidence for them, how can I ever get from such evidence to a knowledge of what actually happened in the past? Yet to claim that we have historical knowledge is surely in the end to claim that certain events happened in the past rather than certain others: for example that Thales did in fact predict an eclipse of the sun rather than an eclipse of the moon: yet we logically cannot get back to an experience or a memory of such past events. How then, if at all, can the logical gap between present evidence and past events be bridged?

2. The positivist answer:

Perhaps the simplest and most clear cut solution to this question has been given by the logical positivists, and their later followers in linquistic analysis. Ayer, Hempel and Popper insist that there can be only one paradigm for historical knowledge, and this is that provided by the physical sciences. History is a form of science, which, given time, can be shown to employ the characteristic features of the one universal scientific method. Thus Hempel insisted:

> "General laws have quite analogous functions in history and in the natural sciences".[1]

The use of such general laws in providing us with knowledge about the

1. "The function of general laws in history" in Readings in Philosophical Analysis ed. H. Feigl and W. Sellars p.459

past can be interpreted in several ways. Ayer, for example, thinks that statements about the past are gained on the basis of general laws from which it is possible to formulate and predict historical experiences which could verify them. He writes without being aware of some strangeness in what he says: "I do not find anything excessively paradoxical in the view that propositions about the past are rules for the prediction of those historical experiences which are commonly said to verify them, and I do not see how else our knowledge of the past is to be analysed."[2] Hempel similarly claims: "If fully and explicitly formulated, an explanation in history would state certain initial conditions, and certain probability hypotheses such that the occurrence of an event to be explained is made highly probably by the initial conditions, in view of the probability hypothesis"[3]

The positivist answer is not the clear cut solution which it appears to be at first sight. Differences between Ayer and Hempel are already shown in the above quotations: what is even harder is to unpack exactly what the positivists are saying about the nature of historical explanation.

Ayer's claim that statements about the past are rules for the prediction of historical experiences which might verify them is puzzling. He seems to mean that statements about the past are in some sense translatable into statements about some aspect of the present, and these translated statements can be verified. Does this mean that the statement "Thales predicted an eclipse of the sun" can be translated without any loss of meaning into the assertion that there are statements which accurately describe Greek texts which refer to the prediction of the

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2. Language, Truth and Logic p.102

3. The Function of General Laws in History. Op. Cit. p.465

eclipse by Thales.[4]

If Ayer is making this claim he is proposing a form of historical reductionism; he is recommending that the meaning of any statement about the past is reducible to the evidence for that statement. But this is an odd claim: it rules out the possibility of any distinction between good and bad evidence. If "Thales predicted an eclipse of the sun" is reducible to "Herodotus, Diogenes Laertius, and Dercyllides say that Thales predicted an eclipse of the sun", then what Thales actually did becomes irrelevant to our so called knowledge of the past: the distinction between what actually happened, and what is stated to have happened collapses.

Ayer solves the problem of the logical gap between what happened in the past and the evidence for what happened in the past by eliminating one of the terms. Thus: "I suspect, moreover that those who object to our pragmatic treatment of history are really basing their objection on a tacit or explicit assumption that the past is somehow objectively there to be corresponded to... that it is real in the metaphysical sense of the term."[5]

Whilst I do not wish to assert that history is "there" in an objective metaphysical sense; that is, that the past has some sort of objective reality, here and now, I find Ayer's claim that the past is not real, in the sense that its reality to its contemporaries is of the same sort as contemporary events to us, contrary to ordinary English usage. It seems perfectly correct to say, "The Battle of Waterloo happened in 1815" or "Gladstone was not prime-minister in 1832", and their use does not seem to be logically any different from "England lost the World Cup match against Brazil last night" or "British troops failed to

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4. (e.g. Herodotus I, 74; Diogenes Laertius I, 23; Dercyllides ap. Theon Smyrn p.198, 14. In Kirk and Raven: The Presocratic Philosophers. pp. 79-80)

5. Language, Truth and Logic. p.102

keep peace in Northern Ireland this morning".

In the Introduction to the second edition of Language, Truth and Logic. Ayer retracts his claim that statements about the past are reducible to present evidence for them. At first he is tempted to be sceptical about our knowledge of past events: "I do not think that the truth of any observation statements which refer to the past or future is a necessary condition of the truth of any statement about the past"[6]

Ayer moves in the same paragraph to a form of historical phenomenalism: "This does not mean that propositions referring to the past cannot be analysed in phenomenal terms; for they can be taken as implying that certain observations would have occurred, if certain conditions had been fulfilled; for they require of the observer that he should occupy a temporal position that ex hypothesi he does not"[7]

Ayer does not regard this as a problem restricted to our knowledge about the past; all contrary to fact conditionals require that an observer be in a different spatial position from the one he in fact is in. But it is still logically possible that an observer might have been in a spatial position relevant to make observations about the past, and therefore any contrary to fact conditional is verifiable in principle.

This solution evades the issue in question:
Firstly, it commits what Patrick Gardiner has nick-named the time-machine fallacy.[8] In asking the question about how I know that a given event happened in the past, I am not asking the very different question of how I would have known the event had occurred if I had been there. If for example I had heard Thales Predict the eclipse of the sun, and then observed the eclipse on 15th March 585 B.C., the problem about knowledge of past events would not arise. If as a matter of fact I

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6. Op. cit. p.19
7. Op. cit. p.19
8. cf. The nature of historical explanation. pp.38-39

could observe the past as I observe the present, the problems of critical philosophy of history would all really be problems about the philosophy of perception and of remembering.

Secondly, all historical statements do not take the form of contrary to fact conditionals, and cannot be analysed into contrary to fact conditionals. In the ordinary English meaning of the words 'know', 'be probable', 'be uncertain' some historical statements can be said to be 'known', others to be 'probable', and yet others to be 'uncertain'. I know, for example, that Louis XVI was king of France at the time of the French revolution. I think it was probable that one of the main causes of the revolution was the King's failure to implement the reforms his finance ministers advised him to introduce. On the other hand it is improbable, and a pious Marxist fancy, to suppose that the French revolution was organised and carried through by the working classes in the interests of the working classes. There is in fact adequate evidence to show that the leadership and organisation of the revolution came from the middle-classes, and that the course of the revolution was directed in the interests of this class. But the assertion that Louis XVI was King of France in the year 1789, is not a contrary to fact conditional. It is not a statement of the type, "if a stronger man had been king of France, there would have been no revolution". The possibility of making such a contrary to fact conditional depends on our knowing the truth of some categorical statements about the past, such as, "There was a monarchical form of government in France both before and during part of the revolution in France". If all statements about the past are reducible to counter-factual statements, it is hard to see how anything can be known about the past at all. To say "If I had been alive in 1789, I could have seen Louis XVI" presupposes some

knowledge of categorical statements about the period in question.

Ayer has again solved the sceptical challenge by stealth: he has tried to make the past in some sense a part of the present; it becomes what I might have observed if only I had been there. But if I had been there I would not have seen the past. The past has vanished in the middle of Ayer's analysis of it.

Hempel's approach is more subtle than Ayer's; he argues that historians use general laws in a similar way to that in which they are used by natural scientists; just as natural scientists can predict from a general law how particular phenomena will behave next week, so a historian can retrodict from a general law how some particular event occurred in the past. One problem about this claim is that few professional historians fill their books with deductions from general laws. Hempel does not find this diquieting: firstly, because the universal hypotheses used by historians are so obvious to everyone that under normal conditions they do not need to be stated; secondly, because the laws historians use are so general that they are often difficult to square with all the relevant empirical data. Statements about the past are, Hempel suggests, explanation sketches. Such explanation maps, can, given time, be filled out into a full blown general law from which the relevant particular details may be deduced. He writes: "In trying to appraise the soundness of a given explanation, one will first have to attempt to reconstruct as completely as possible the argument constituting the explanation, or explanation sketch"[9]

There is a difference, however, between making an abstract methodological plan for the use of historians, and showing that this plan contains the methodological principles which all those who claim to provide us with knowledge about the past logically must use. I do not wish to deny that general laws are used in historical reasoning, but I

9. Op. cit. p.466

do not think that they are employed in the way Hempel suggests.
The problem results from Hempel's failure to draw distinction between the two possible meanings of the word 'history'. Firstly, 'history' can refer to the knowledge that a given event in the past has occurred; for example, the knowledge that the Bolshevik revolution occurred in 1917. Secondly, 'history' can refer to an attempted explanation of why some event known to have happened in the past occurred when and in the way it in fact did, rather than at some other time, or in some other way. For example, attempts may be made to explain the Bolshevik revolution in terms of the war weariness of the Russian people, and the ineffectiveness of the Menshevik government. Now in the case of history as knowledge that a past event has occurred, I do not need to bring in general laws: for general laws are unnecessary to discover whether or not a particular event is or has been in existence. If I want to explain why the Bolshevik revolution occurred when it did general laws will prove very helpful; for the historian can then compare the features of the French revolution and the other revolutions in Nineteenth century Europe which were inspired by it, and then go on to draw a picture of the general features of revolutions in modern European states.

Hempel's analysis of the explanation of events of the past in terms of explanation sketches and general laws, presupposes the reality of the past in the ordinary senses of these words. In order to formulate a scientific law, I must know of the existence of some particular events in relation to which the law provides some sort of explanation. For example unless I can observe the behaviour of some gases, I can logically never be in a position to produce a falsification instance for Boyle's law. Similarly, unless I know that some events really happened in the past, there can be no past at all which requires explanation in terms of general laws and explanation sketches.

Hempel, unfortunately, has very little to say about how general laws are formulated in the case of historical explanations. There is not a clear parallel here with the physical sciences, for experimentation in history is not possible. I cannot repeat the French revolution in order to see more clearly what the causes were. Further, although each revolution in, for example, Nineteenth century Europe, has points of similarity and comparison with any other revolution in Europe in the same period, they also have many points of dissimilarity. Gases, on the other hand, although they differ numerically, are very similar to each other and are therefore much more easily assimilated under one scientific law, than say the French revolution and the Russian revolution.

Hempel could try to get out of making the verification or falsification of explanation sketches about past events depend on the actual occurrence of individual past events by arguing that we can somehow frame generalisations from present experience, and go on to deduce from this detailed particulars about the past. For example if I had lived through the Cuban revolution which brought Fidel Castro to power, I might abstract from my experience general features about revolutions. These general features about the causes of revolutions could then be used as explanations for the French Revolution, the Russian revolution and so on. But, if any such deducation were valid, the truth of the conclusion about the past would have to be contained within the truth of the premises which are about a present event. If he chose to adopt this position, Hempel like Ayer, would be solving the problem of the logical gap between statements about the past and statements about our evidence for the past, by eliminating the possibility of their being anything which could in the ordinary sense of the word be described as "the past"

3. The idealist answer

Whilst positivists claim that history is a somewhat recalcitrant branch of the natural sciences, Idealists tend to insist on the autonomy of history. History is not a sub-department of some other subject, it has a methodology and criterion of knowledge which are equally as good, if not better, than those of the physical sciences. History is not the search for general laws, from which I can retrodict the necessary conditions of sets of events in the past. It is not the passive collection of general laws from an observarion of a set of brute facts. Rather, history is the study of what is particular: Croce and Dilthey even went so far as to say that it is the study of what is unique; but their efforts to show exactly what this uniqueness consisted in is far from satisfactory.

Collingwood claims that this distinction between history and the sciences is one of quality and not merely of quantity. The sciences are concerned merely to observe the external world, and record causal relations between events within it. A historian, however, is not concerned with 'brute facts' and their causes, and is never a mere spectator.

"To the scientist nature is always merely a phenomenon, not in the sense of being defective in reality, but in the sense of being a spectacle presented to his intelligent observation; whereas the events of history are never mere phenomenon, never mere spectacles for contemplation, but things the historian looks not at, but through, to discern the thought within them."[10]

The point Collingwood is making here is ambiguous. It is quite true and unobjectionable to suggest, that history is not just a catalogue of events that have happened in the past, but is an attempt to explain the past events, and therefore the historian looks not just at, but through past events to try and discover their explanation. But this point by

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10. The Idea of History. p.214

itself does not help to substantiate Collingwood's belief that there is a difference in type between historical and physical method, or the point that the past must be relived. Even Hempel would concede that history is not a sort of telephone directory of past events; it involves for Hempel the construction of explanation sketches, and therefore cannot be just the passive observing of past events.

In saying that history has a method of its own which is distinct in kind from the physical sciences, Collingwood means to say that however much causal explanation may be involved in historical explanation, teleological explanation is always involved as well. This is because history is essentially an account of the past action of human beings and not of phenomena.

To come to understand the past actions of human beings we do not need to observe what they did, but we have to re-enact their thoughts in our own mind. Because human beings in the present and those who lived in the past, have a common humanity, and a common type of intellectual apparatus, I can 'get inside' figures of the past, and hence come to understand their motives and reasons for acting as they did.

"The historian is not concerned with events as such at all... To the historian, the activities whose history he is studying, are not spectacles to be watched, but experiences to be lived through in his own mind; they are objective or known to him, only because they are also subjective activities of his own."[11]

In other words, my knowledge that Mackonochie was persecuted by the Church Association for his supposedly 'Papish' ritual practices whilst he was Vicar of St. Alban's Holborn, is not a mere matter of brute fact, rather like the fact that my tin of instant shaving cream is almost empty. The story about Mackonnochie does not become history until I 'relive' or

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11. The idea of History p.p.217, & 218

'reenact' what he thought. For example I can think what it would be like to be brought before the court of the Arches and charged with the betrayal of Protestantism on the ground that I genuflected before the eucharistic elements and also elevated them at appropriate points in the communion service. Or again, I can understand the thought of someone like Mackonochie, who when forbidden by the court of the Arches to elevate the host and chalice above his head, proceeded to elevate the host and chalice to the height of the last wrinkle on his forehead.[12]

The re-enactment, or reliving of the thoughts of those who lived in the past is not a mere intuitive guess at what such people may possible have thought: the historian, if he is to be critical, must put the documentary, archaeological, or other evidence on the basis of which he formulates his picture of the past, to the question. History is not the sort of discipline where newspaper cuttings on one issue are stuck beside each other to form a harmonised narrative. The evidence must be sifted and questioned: this putting of the past to the question will draw out how to relive here and now, the thoughts of those who are being studied. Collingwood insists: "The scissors and paste historian reads them (i.e. his sources) in a receptive spirit to find out what they said. The scientific historian reads them with a question in mind, having taken the initiative by deciding for himself what he wants to find out from them."[13]
Thus for Collingwood, the relation between the evidence for the past and past events is filled in by an 'a priori' historical imagination, which by putting the evidence to the question, enables the historian to relive, and re-create the thoughts of the people in the past whom he is studying. The historian is like an artist in the sense that both the historian and the artist imaginatively create a new picture from the materials they employ. The historian however, has three restrictions on his technique which do not

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12. Cf. Michael Reynolds: Martyr of Ritualism

~~13. Cf. Op. cit. p.246~~

13. The Idea of History: p.269

apply to the artist. Firstly, the historian's picture must be localised in space and time. Secondly, all history must be consistent with itself. Thirdly, the historian's world is related to evidence in a way an artist's world is not.[14]

But, what about periods or events in history which a historian finds it difficult to relive, or reenact? For example, is it possible for us to relive the thoughts of the members of a primitive African tribe who believe that their future safety and security depends on the monthly performance of a human sacrifice? Collingwood states:

"Certain historians find in certain periods of history nothing intelligible, and call them dark ages: but such phases tell us nothing about these ages, though they tell us great deal about the persons who use them... namely that they were unable to rethink the thoughts which were fundamental to their life."[15]

Here Collingwood is coming close to the views expressed by F.H. Bradley, in his early paper "The presuppositions of critical history". It is all very well for Collingwood to say "such phases tell us nothing about these ages themselves, though they tell us a great deal about the persons who use them", but if all history is in some sense the history of thought, then if the thoughts of a past age cannot be re-enacted, nothing can be known about that age. Similarly Bradley proclaims; "The experience of others has no meaning for us, except and insofar as it becomes our own; the existence of others is no existence for us, if it is not in our world that they live."[16]

Bradley does not mean that knowledge of the past depends on the limits of any given individual's experience: he is not advocating a sort of historical solipsism. Rather: "Testimony goes beyond individual

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14. Cf. Op. Cit. p.246
15. Op. Cit. pp.218-219
16. "The Presuppositions of critical History" In Collected Essays Vol. I p.19

experience, but not beyond our experience; or it takes us beyond our experience, if it takes us with it."[17]

In other words, in order for someone to understand any historical statement, that statement must in principle be capable of cohering with the contemporary structure and presuppositions of human knowledge. Thus:

"The past varies with the present, and can never do otherwise, since it is always the present on which it rests. This present is presupposed by it, and is its necessary pre-conception."[18]

Is the Idealist solution to the sceptical challenge, any more adequate than the positivist answer?

The first problem about the idealist approach is that it attempts to eliminate the logical gap between the past and the evidence for the past by assimilating the former to the latter. We cannot confront the past in the way we can be confronted by the present. So, if the past is to be known at all, the idealists suggest, it can only be known if it can in some sense, be translated into some aspect of the present. In the cases of Dilthey, Croce and Collingwood, this translation of statements about the past into statements about the present rests on the ability to relive and re-enact, the thoughts, intentions and motives of those who lived in the past. Oakeshott saw even more clearly than Collingwood the tendency of Idealist philosophers of history to make the past a part of the present.

"If the historical past be knowable, it must belong to the present world or experience; if it be unknowable, history is more than futile, it is impossible."[19]

Secondly, Collingwood's recommendations about the nature of historical explanation restrict what can be counted as history. I can understand

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17. Op. Cit. Collected Essays, Vol. I p.30
18. Op. Cit. p.20
19. Experience and its modes, p.107

what it is like to re-live the thoughts of a general before and during a battle, or the thoughts of a master diplomat in negotiating a political alliance, or the thoughts of a martyr as he faces death. But what do we re-live when we read or write economic or social history? Is economic history nothing over and above the theories of great sociologists?

Thirdly, Collingwood rules out the possibility of true statements being made about the past. Thus he wrote:

"The scientific historian never asks himself, 'Is this statement true or false?'.... but, 'What does this statement mean?'"[20]

Any idealist theory of history which is committed to the view that all history is the history of thought, must rest on a coherence rather than a correspondence theory of the nature of true statements. Although our knowledge of the past cannot rest on the naively realist correspondence theory of truth, because we cannot bring back the past in order to compare our evidence for what happened in the past, with what in fact happened in the past yet, surely the evidence for what happened in the past is not as neatly severed from what in fact happened in the past as Collingwood demands.

If our knowledge of the past depends on our abilities to re-enact, and relive the past, then what happened in the past which we cannot re-enact or relive, cannot be known to us. In other words, the possibilities of past existence are limited by Collingwood's epistemology. His theory seems to amount to the view that history is one big innate idea, or that we cannot learn anything from the past which isn't in some way incapsulated in our present mental and intellectual capacities.

But surely we want to say that what we learn from the past may, on occasions correct and improve our present outlook, or world view. For example, those of Hitler's advisors who recommended that he did not invade

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20. The Idea of History p.275

Russia, and march his armies deep into Eastern Europe saw that the consequences of such a campaign might be as disasterous to Hitler as they were to Napoleon. As the events turned out Hitler's refusal to learn from a previous Russian campaign led to his eventual loss of the war, and the destruction of the cream of his armies by the Russian winter. If the past, as Collingwood's view seems to imply, can tell us nothing except what is incapsulated in our present experience, it is hard to see how mankind can ever learn from his long range past knowledge. Collingwood seems to endorse Hegel's view that man learns nothing from the past except that he learns nothing from the past.

4. Parallels in the positivist and Idealist answers

At first sight the positivist and the idealist versions of a critical philosophy of history seem to be diametrically opposed: the former claims that history consists of some sort of brute facts from which we can deduce causal generalisations; the latter that it consists in an empathetic re-living of past events. Both critical analyses of our knowledge of the past provide similar stresses and strains in their answer to the sceptical insistence that there is a logical gap between evidence for past events and the past events themselves. Firstly, both Ayer and Collingwood try to bridge the gap between the past and the evidence for the past, by denying that there is really any gap at all. In different ways they assimilate the past to the present, and so remove one of the terms between which there is supposed by the sceptic to be a logical gap, The positivists make either the past reducible to the present evidence for the past, or make it dependent on someone's ability to have been in a position to perceive it; the idealists reduce past events to our ability to relive them.

Secondly, both philosophical positions make the present the criterion

of what may have happened in the past, and so place an 'a priori' restriction on what may have happened. The occurrence of a miracle such as the resurrection, for example, is ruled out by both Ayer and Collingwood. Both philosophers appear prima facie to be open minded: anything goes that can be relived by my thought processes, or which I might have perceived, could I have been there. The shades of the prison house close in on this pristine openness however: some features of the past cannot be relived in my thought; also I could in principle only have been in a position to experience an event which could have been deduced from some sort of universal generalisation. The tension over what might have happened in the past which is clear both in the positivist and Idealist viewpoints, reflects the tension between empiricism and rationalism in Hume. In his more empiricist moods Hume was willing to concede:

"What is intelligible, and can be distinctly conceived, implies no contradition, and can never be proved false by any demonstative argument or reasoning a priori."[21]

Yet when he comes to discuss the notion of miracle, Hume adopts a coherence theory of truth based on the belief that our present experience builds up in us customary expectations, which limit the range of the possibilities of our experience. What customary experience forordains, reality cannot modify. Thus: "As a uniform experience amounts to a proof, there is here a direct and full proof from the nature of fact against any miracle."[22]

Thirdly, both Ayer and Collingwood deny that truth can be attributed to statements about the past: Ayer because he thinks this is to hypostasize the past into some sort of metaphysical entity, Collingwood because the notion of a true statement about the past becomes redundant, if the past is nothing but my reliving of thoughts that occurred in the past. Yet

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21. The Enquiry. ed. Selby-Bigge. p.35
22. Enquiry. ed. Selby-Bigge. p.115

the ordinary use of such words as 'history' and 'the past' seems to imply that there is in some objective sense a past about which history can be written; that is to say there is something over and above the evidence for statements about the past, which even if it is largely unmeasurable and unavailable to us, if the ultimate criterion for the truth of the accounts historians give us of past events.

Pt. II THEOLOGY AND THE CRITICAL PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY

A great deal of modern Protestant theology looks very much like an attempt to conduct a salvage operation which is designed to make clear how it is possible to retain belief in Jesus Christ, and at the same time remain intellectually honest. For the same sceptical challenge which faces the secular historian also faces the theologian. If Christians are correct in arguing that the locus of God's revelation to man is in Jesus of Nazareth, then in order to know about this supposed revelation, it is necessary to know about a period of time in the past; it is necessary to know the history of this man's life and actions. Theologians are therefore faced by the question: how, if at all, is it possible to bridge the logical gap between statements describing what Jesus of Nazareth said and did, and statements describing the evidence for what Jesus of Nazareth said and did. The solution found to this question by theologians tends to be determined by their conscious and unconscious philosophical presuppositions; just as it did in the examples discussed above of secular critical philosophies of history.

(a) Theology and the retreat from the appeal to history

One characteristic feature of some recent Protestant dogmatic theology, is the tendency to try and evade the question "How is it possible to infer statements about what happened in the past from statements about the present

evidence for what happened in the past?" In fact, it is frequently asserted that historical evidence, or lack of evidence about the words and actions of Jesus, is logically quite irrelevant to faith in Jesus as the Christ. Thus Rudolf Bultmann states:

"It is important to bear in mind that if the fact should be established that Jesus was conscious of being the messiah or the son of man, that would only establish an historical fact, not prove an article of faith. Rather the acknowledgement of Jesus as the one in whom God's Work decisively encounters man ---- is a pure act of faith, independent of the historical question whether or not Jesus considered himself to be the Messiah. Only the historian ca answer this question --- so far as it can be answered at all --- and faith being a personal decision cannot be dependent on the historians' labour."[23]

Again Karl Barth, when he was writing the early volumes of the Church Dogmatics, seems to have been in complete accord with Bultmann in stressing the logical irrelevance of historical evidence to faith in Jesus as the Christ. Thus he argues:

"But the (Easter) stories are couched in the imaginative and poetic style of historical Saga, and are therefore marked off by a corresponding obscurity. For they are describing an event beyond the reach of historical research or depiction. Hence, we have no right to try to analyse them or harmonise them."[24]

The reasons Bultmann and Barth give for this divorce between historical evidence for the doings and saying of Jesus, and faith in him as Christ are very similar, and are reducible to three main arguments.

Firstly, it is argued that if faith in Christ is logically related to historical evidenme for particular events in the past, then faith becomes

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23. Rudolf Bultmann. Theology of the New Testament. Vol. 1 Eng. trans.p.26

24. Karl Barth: Church Dogmatics Vo. III Pt. ii Eng. trans. p.452

dependent on the present state of the evidence in favour of such past events. For example, suppose I believe that Jesus instituted the Holy Communion on the first Maundy Thursday as a means of grace through which all men can find salvation. If this belief depends on the evidence of historical investigations two consequences seem to follow: (a) I can never been absolutely certain that Christ instituted the Holy Communion because, being a historical statement, it depends on empirical evidence, and such evidence is never one hundred per cent certain. New historical evidence may be discovered which will overthrow my belief; and even if no such evidence is actually discovered, the logical possibility still remains that at some date it may be discovered; (b) As a consequence of (a), I can never be certain that Christ instituted the Holy Communion until the last living historian has examined the evidence and given his verdict. In fact faith becomes dependent on the work of academic historians. So, if I am not a professional historian myself, the content of my faith will have to await the deliberations of historians. Thus academic historians, in this situation will take the place of the Papacy as the main authority in matters of faith. And furthermore, the immediate access of the believer to God becomes impossible.

Secondly, it is argued that if historical statements can verify or falsify statements of faith, then believers are justified by the ingenuity of historians and no longer by God's grace. Bultmann makes this point very cogently when he writes:

"There is no difference between security built on good works, and security built on objectifying knowledge." [25]

Bultmann is applying the principle of justification by faith alone to the mode of our knowledge of the deeds and sayings of Jesus. If the Christian believer is justified by God's grace, and not by any morally good

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25. R. Bultmann. Jesus Christ and Mythology. p.184

actions of his own; then, a fortiori, the believer cannot be justified by his own historical works, such as producing good evidence for the occurrence of a particular event in Jesus' life, but only by accepting that his faith in Christ is something which God's grace alone can achieve. In fact to search for historical evidence for particular events in Jesus's life is a sin; it is to try to grapp for ourselves something God has offered as a free gift.

Thirdly, and following from the above arguments, it is suggested that statements about faith in God, and statements about the past are two logically different types of statements, and there are no logical relations between them. Bultmann makes this point clearly by drawing a distinction between historisch and geschichtlich. Historisch is any set of events or facts which occur at a specific place, on a specific date, and can be verified or falsified by ordinary historical evidence. Thus the death of Jesus on the cross is historisch: ordinary historical investigation can confirm whether or not this event happened. Such an event, being historisch has no religious significance, for many other men have died unjustly on a cross. If Jesus' death were only such an historical event, we should pity Jesus, as we might pity any man unjustly executed, but we would not through this past event come to regard him as our Lord and Saviour.

Bultmann thinks that the crucifixion in order to be of religious value, must have Geschichtlich significance: and it has this if it is stated that Jesus died for my sins. This Geschlichtlich statement is a belief which cannot be referred to a particular date or place, and cannot be empirically verified or falsified. Thus the religious significance of the crucifixion is not that Jesus of Nazareth died on a hill outside Jerusalem around the year 33 A.D.: It is rather that Jesus Christ died to

save me from my sins. A further point is that to insist on searching for the historish aspect of a religious belief may end by destroying its Geschichtlich aspect. As Bultmann states:

"Faith in God, like faith in justification refuses to single out qualified and definable actions as holy actions. Correspondingly, faith in God like faith in creation, refuses to single out qualified and definable realms among the observable realities of nature and history."[26]

Barth draws a similar distinction between faith in Christ and historical evidence about Jesus' doings and sayings, when he uses the concept of the "saga". In the early volumes of Church Dogmatics he insists that God is nothing over and above his acts, and God being God is free to act when and how He chooses. Barth in fact adopts an ambiguous view about the importance of the historical evidence in its relation to faith in Christ. On the one hand Barth argues that God's revelation is both a veiling and an unveiling. Even in Jesus Christ, God's communication with man is indirect, in the sense that Jesus of Nazareth cannot be seen to be the Son of God merely by a close scrutiny of his body and actions. Thus Barth in these early volumes, tends to regard the Bible as consisting of "sagas" a saga being a story which may or may not be historically true. The historical truth or falsity of a saga, is quite irrelevant to the question of whether a particular saga contains the Word of God. For any given saga in the Bible will only contain the Word of God when and where God wills it to do so. God's presence in His Word cannot be pinned down or restricted by anything, least of all by man's verification and/or falsification procedures. For:

"Revelation is nothing but the freedom of God's grace"[27]

On the other hand, Barth insists that the doctrine of justification by faith must be taken seriously. This doctrine he believes, implies the

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26. R. Bultmann Op. cit. p.84

27. K. Barth Church Dogmatics Vol. I Pt. I Eng. trans. p.132

actual historical occurrance of the virgin birth and the empty tomb. Indeed, in his debate with Brunner about natural theology, Barth goes as far as to say that Brunner's denial of the historicity of the Virgin birth is a symptom of his denial of the sola fide: it amounts to a denial that God alone is responsible for the salvation of man through the incarnation. At first sight, Barth seems to be saying that if the doctrine of justification by faith only is true, then the tomb was empty, and Jesus was born of a virgin. But if Barth were asserting that justification sola fide materially implies the empty tomb and the virgin birth, then he would have to admit that if the tomb was not as a matter of historical fact empty on the third day or if Mary was not born of a virgin then the doctrine of justification by faith only is false.[28] Thus the non-occurrence of an event in the past would falsify the doctrine of the sola fide.

Unfortunately, Barth's argument is not as straightforward as this. In the early volumes of the Church Dogmatics Barth wants to have his cake and eat it over the historicity of the life of Jesus. For example, his claim that the historical occurrence of the empty tomb is a necessary condition of the presence of Jesus in our time, implies that historical evidence could show that the story of the empty tomb is probable, or lack of such evidence could show that the story is an unlikely fable. But Barth's argument appears to be entirely "a priori". He argues that the doctrine of justification by faith only is true, therefore the empty tomb and the virgin birth must have happened. He solves the problem of historical scepticism by eliminating its possibility. If we cannot in any ordinary sense of the word "know" whether the tomb was empty, if the doctrine of justification sola fide can, by itself, guarantee the actuality of the past, in a way that historico-critical methods cannot,

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28. $(p \supset q. -q) \therefore -p$

Then no room is left for doubt about the occurrence of these past events. The meaning of the phrase "knowing the past" has been stealthily redefined. For to say that we know the tomb was empty by the eye of faith alone, is a different sort of knowing, from knowing that Peter wept after he betrayed Jesus, or knowing that Charles II had several mistresses.

There is an interesting point of contrast between Barth and Bultmann and the critical philosophers of history such as Hempel and Collingwood. The latter philosophers assume that it is possible to know what happened in the past: the task they set themselves is to provide a correct philosophical analysis of what the phrase "knowing the past" means. Barth, and particularly Bultmann, start from a position of scepticism about the possibility of knowing very much of the life of Jesus. The question they attempt to answer appears to be: since there is so little evidence for what Jesus did and said, how is it possible for theology to manage without such historical knowledge? They both appeal to the doctrine of justification sola fide, and with its help, try to make from the whore of their historical scepticism, an honest woman of faith.

This scepticism about the knowability of the life of Jesus is plainly illustrated by the picture Bultmann draws about what can be known about Jesus. He thinks that Jesus called on men to decide for God here and now because God was going to introduce a new age very soon.[29] But, Bultmann thinks, Jesus was obviously mistaken in this belief; the new age never came.[30] Jesus, did not believe God's reign was present in his own person[31] Furthermore, he did not believe himself to be the messiah, nor the eschatological son of Man, nor that He himself was the Messiah designate, whose coming was expected very soon[32] Jesus was mistaken again in this expectation. The early Church on the other hand, thought that Jesus was

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29. R. Bultmann New Testament Theology Vol. I Eng. trans. p.21
30. Bultmann. Op. cit. p.22
31. Bultmann. Op. cit. p.22
32. Bultmann. Op. cit. p.9

the Messiah and the son of Man; they also thought that he had risen from the dead. In all these beliefs they were mistaken. The correct interpretation of the gospel, Bultmann thinks is that through the preaching of the death of Jesus, God offers man salvation, and a new future with their faith in him. What Jesus was really like is unimportant for Paul[33] so there is no good reason why we should speculate about it. For "Only the historian can answer such questions, and faith, being personal decision, cannot be dependent on the historians' labour"[34]

The solution offered to how it is possible to know what happened in the past; how, in the case of Christian theology, it is possible to know what Jesus actually said and did, has been influenced by the conscious and unconscious philosophical presuppositions which Bultmann and Barth accept. The presupossitions they adopt are not drawn purely from either the Logical Positivist or the Idealist camp but tend to be a strange combination of both sets of assumptions.

Bultmann's views differ from those of Barth in that Bultmann at one point comes close to allowing the scientific outlook to hold a place of equal importance with the doctrine of justification by faith. Just as the Logical Positivists believed that all the statements of history can, sooner or later be subsumed under some scientific generalisation[35] so for Bultmann the possibility of an event happening in the past is dependent on whether or not the event in question is compatible with a known scientific generalisation. Thus the modern world view formulated on the basis of a scientific outlook is incompatible with the New Testament view, based as it is on the possibility of the miraculous. As Bultmann makes the point: "It is impossible to use the electric light and wireless and to avail ourselves of modern medical and surgical discoveries, and at the

33. Bultmann Op. cit. p.293-4

34. Bultmann Op. cit. p.26

35. Thus "General laws have quite analogous functions in history and in the natural sciences" cf. Hempel. Op. cit. p.459

same time to believe in the New Testament world of spirits and miracles. We may think we can manage in our own lives, but to expect others to do so is to make the Christian faith unintelligible and unacceptable to the modern world"[36]

One of the presuppositions adopted by both Barth and Bultmann is held in common with both the Logical Positivists and the Idealists. All agree that an a priori criterion can be laid down which will specify what can have happened in the past. For the Positivist only those events could be conceived to have happened in the past which can be deduced from some sort of universal generalisation. For the Idealists, only those events can be considered as having a reality in the past which can be relived in my thought. For Barth and Bultmann, the only events in the past which can have theological significance are those which are compatible with the doctrine of Justification by faith. Thus for Barth, the virgin birth must have actually happened in the past, no matter how good or bad the evidence for it is, simply because he lays down the arguable a priori principle that the doctrine of justification by faith requires it. On the other hand Bultmann tends to argue that the miracle stories of the gospels, cannot be intended to provide evidence for the divinity of Christ's person, for man must be saved by God's grace and not by any volume of the evidence to suggest that Jesus was the Son of God.

There is also an Idealist presupposition behind the arguments of Barth and Bultmann. This is made clear in the emphasis they both place on the presence of Jesus Christ in the preaching of his Word. Barth argues that the words of the Bible and hence any historical statements that may be contained in the Bible, are God's Word only when God chooses to make himself present in his word. What is important is not whether a particular passage in the Bible is historically true or false; what matters

36. Bultmann. "New Testament and Mythology" Eng. trans. in Kerygma and Myth Vol. I p.5

is whether the "saga" in question is being used by God as a medium for communicating His Word. Thus, just as for the Idealists, no event is historical which cannot be relived in my thought, so for Barth, no event can have theological significance unless it is relived in the present by God making the words describing this event His word. Bultmann at times is even more radical than Barth, and is willing to identify the purported reality of a past event with the fact that certain people relive, or re-call the past event. Thus in one of his discussions of the resurrection, Bultmann identifies the occurrence of the resurrection with the fact that the first disciples came to believe in the resurrection. Thus he writes: "The resurrection itself is not an event of past history. All that historical criticism can establish is the fact that the first disciples came to believe in the resurrection"[37]

(b) Can Christian theology dispense with the past?

A rigid divorce between faith in Christ, and the knowledge of what Jesus of Nazareth said and did, such as that suggested by the early Barth and Bultmann removes the belief that God revealed himself in Jesus Christ from the possibility of empirical refutation. If Christ's presence to the believer has theological significance only when the Word is preached, and the words preached have no logical relations with the statements in the gospels which describe what Jesus said and did, then the findings of critical historians are logically irrelevant to faith in Jesus as the Christ, and can never verify or falsify any statements of faith that Jesus is the Christ.

This rigid divorce of statements of faith in Christ from statements describing the earthly life of Jesus can only be made at a price: the price of denying that God revealed himself through the earthly actions and words of Jesus Christ. For to say that God revealed himself through

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37. R. Bultmann Kerygma and Myth. Op. cit. p.42

the words and actions of a historical person means that the deeds and actions of that person are relevant to the content of that revelation. Furthermore, if what can be discovered about the words and actions of Jesus by historical investigations is not logically relevant to what God is revealing through Jesus, then it cannot be the case that God's revelation is through a historical person.

The early Barth and Bultmann have in fact been accused of Docetism on the ground that they deny that the earthly life of Jesus of Nazareth has any connection with faith in Christ as Lord. The early Barth did this by concentrating so much on Christ's presence in the Word, that he ignored the Word made flesh. For if the Bible consists of "sagas" the truth or falsity of which is irrelevant to whether the "sagas" contain the Word of God, then the life of Jesus of Nazareth becomes something quite separate from, and isolated from the presence of Christ in the Word. Bultmann is more radical and tends to argue that little can be known of the life and words of Jesus, apart from what was preached about him by the early Church. But if the Biblical narratives provide us with a good account, not of what Jesus said and did, but what the early Church said he said and did, then the locus of God's purported revelation appears to have been pushed back one stage. It is no longer Jesus of Nazareth through whom God reveals himself, but what the early Church thought about Jesus of Nazareth. The Word is no longer directly linked with the doings and sayings of one particular man who lived in the past.

One of the most powerful arguments in favour of the irrelevance of historical evidence to faith in Christ, is that historical investigations can provide us with only probable conclusions, whereas a statement of faith is always certain, for a faith which amounts to a probability is not genuine faith. This argument however seems to be based on a misconception about the nature of knowledge. It bears similarities to the insistence of

rationalists that knowledge is not really knowledge unless it is impossible to be mistaken about what is known. This definition of knowledge led the 17th century rationalists to conclude that mathematical knowledge alone is the only genuine type of knowledge, and any statements which do not have the formal perfection of mathematical statements cannot be knowledge in any sense. Similarly the argument we are examining suggests that faith to be real faith must be certain beyond any possibility of doubt; and of course it follows from this that faith cannot have any logical connexions with the empirical statements of history which can never be more than probably true.

The assumption that faith must by definition be certain, if it is to be faith at all seems highly questionable. If faith is to be faith in the revelation of God in and through a historical person, then it would seem inappropriate to demand this type of certainty. For, if God has chosen to reveal himself in a particular series of events which are part of the past, then the empirical aspects of these events can be known only by means of historical investigation, and can never be anything but probably true. Many of the claims made by historians would seem to be as probable as the beliefs we hold about our everyday lives. For example we all know that Keble preached his Assize sermon in 1833 as reliably as we can know that Mr. Heath is Prime Minister of Britain. Not all historical claims made about the past are as reliable as this one; there are clearly degrees of probability. The questions raised by the gospel narratives are such questions as: is there sufficient evidence to suppose that Jesus instituted the Holy Communion? or is there sufficient evidence to suppose that he died on a cross? and so on. If the occurrence of the events is improbable, then the believer who wishes to retain his intellectual honesty can do no other than abandon his belief that these events happened in the past.

The above argument is closely related to the argument that if faith depends on the findings of historians, then faith becomes subject to the Papacy of professors: the believer can never be certain that what he believes about Jesus is true, for his present beliefs may be overthrown by new historical findings the week after next. He can never be sure what he should believe about the earthly life of Jesus until every possible piece of evidence has been uncovered, and until every historian who will ever live has passed his verdict on it.

This argument is defining historical knowledge so rigidly that if it were strictly applied it would be impossible to know anything about the past. If in order to know that an event in the past has happened it is necessary to present all the evidence that will ever be discovered about the event in question, and also the evaluation by every possible historian, then there will never be sufficient evidence to say that we know a particular event occurred in the past; even an event which occurred in the recent past such as the performance of Gladstone as Prime Minister. In the case of historical events in the distance past, the ordinary man has no choice but to rely on what the majority of professional historians are saying on the issue; there is no other way of obtaining historical knowledge. Similarly someone who is not a professional historian can only rely on what professional historians say about the reliability and credibility of the New Testament documents; and where the authorities disagree he has to examine the arguments of the opposing sides and decide for himself which arguments are the most persuasive.

The reliance on the findings of critical historians will mean two things. Firstly, that some mistaken beliefs will be held from time to time about the life and ministry of Jesus. It is inevitable that as fresh evidence comes to light we will find that some of the things that were believed about the life of Jesus turn out to be mistaken. Secondly,

our picture of Jesus will change from age to age, because the historical certainties of one age, often become the points of scepticism for the next. Each generation of historians and New Testament scholars tend to rewrite history to bring it into line with new discoveries and with their own interests and presuppositions. But we cannot but depend on historians to assess the reliability and adequacy of the evidence we possess for the doings and sayings of Jesus. This is surely part of what it means to say that the locus of God's revelation was a particular person who lived in the past; it is part of what it means to say that the Word was made flesh.

The doctrine of Justification by faith is, as we have illustrated above, often given as a reason for saying that the findings of critical historians are irrelevant to our faith in Jesus as the Christ. For if we are justified by God's grace given in Christ, then any appeal to historical evidence represents man's attempt to justify himself epistemologically, and is therefore a rejection of God's grace. The logical consequences of this argument seem to lead to irrationalism. If I am justified by God's grace, and this means that historical evidence for what happened or did not happen when God revealed himself through past events is irrelevant, then a believer could insist that his certainty of God's grace guaranteed any and every event a particular religion required. Barth as we have shown suggests that the doctrine of justification by faith guaranteed the fact of the empty tomb and of the virgin birth. Could it not equally plausibly be argued that this doctrine guarantees the immaculate conception: if Jesus had to be born of a Virgin because man's salvation came from God and not from man, then must not Mary have been born without sin, to show that even the Mother of God was formed by God's grace and not by any power of man? Any belief in fact that can in some way be logically deduced from the doctrine of Justification by faith seems to have its historicity guaranteed by this argument.

More seriously if God revealed himself in and through the actions and sayings of a particular person who lived in the past, then, to say that we know this means that there is historical evidence to indicate that this person did and said the things attributed to him. God's grace cannot change the course of the past: if particular sayings and doings are attributed to Jesus, then the only way of knowing whether these are genuine or fictitious is by the ordinary processes of historical investigation. God cannot by divine fiat make something that has happened in the past not to have happened, or make something that did not happen in the past have happened. Not even God can rewrite the course of history for the benefit of the faithful.

But if both Barth and Bultmann are mistaken in suggesting that there are no logical relations between statements about the past doings and sayings of Jesus, and Christ as the Lord of faith? what exactly is the logical relationship between the two?

Barth and Bultmann both rightly stress that statements containing the word "God" cannot be conclusively verified, or falsified. For if any statement containing the word "God" could be strongly verified or falsified then God would no longer be in any sense transcendent; he would be identical with some observable natural sequence. As A.J. Ayer has written: "If the sentence" 'God exists' entails no more than that certain types of phenomena occur in certain sequences, then to assert the existence of a god will be simply equivalent to asserting that there is the requisite regularity in nature"[38]

But although statements describing God are never identical with statements describing the world, there do seem to be logical relations between these two types of statements. For consider the two following statements:-

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38. Language, truth and logic. 2nd. ed. p.115

1 Jesus died on the cross to reconcile the world to God.

2 Jesus died on a cross.

If it is to be true that Jesus died on a cross to reconcile the world to God, then it must be historically true that Jesus died on a cross. Furthermore, if there is good historical evidence to show that Jesus was never crucified, then it cannot be true that Jesus died on a cross to reconcile the world to God. The theological claim in this instance depends for its truth on the truth of the historical claim. I will attempt to elucidate the consequences of this relationship in the concluding chapter.

P A R T V.

CONCLUSION.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

I. The relevance of the verification principle

How far is the Logical Positivist challenge to the meaning of religious statements a logically appropriate challenge? Are theological statements the sort of statements which differ so greatly in their logical status from all other types of statements that it is inappropriate to insist that they should be verifiable or falsifiable by sense experience?

This demand is logically inappropriate in the form in which it was first put forward by the Logical Positivists. I mentioned in Chapter I that the Logical Positivists, despite their denials, were engaged in putting forward a metaphysical programme; they insisted that all genuine knowledge is scientific knowledge, and so any statement which is to be counted as part of the body of human knowledge, must be of the same logical type as a scientific statement, and also verifiable or falsifiable in the same way as any scientific hypothesis. Thus Neurath demanded: "All laws whether chemical, climatical or sociological must be, therefore, conceived as constituents of a unified science..... what is essential is that only physicalistically formulated correlations be employed in the description of living things, whatever may be observed in these things."[1] It follows from this that any statements which cannot be included in the system of unified science cannot have cognitive meaning. Theological statements were therefore classified along with poetry and music; they express emotional reactions to life, but do not state anything about what is the case; they do not communicate information.

In reaction to the demand of the Logical Positivists that

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1. Otto Neurath "Sociology and physicalism" Erkenntnis Vol. II 1931/2 Ayer Op. cit. pp.284 and 298/9

theological statements must either be capable of assimilation into the system of unified science, or must lack any cognitive import, theologians such as Barth have insisted that theological statements are autonomous. For if theological statements could be assimilated to the system of unified science, statements referring to God would be reducible without loss of meaning to scientific statements referring to the natural world. This would identify God with the natural world and so deny his transcendence of the world, and his creation of all things visible and invisible. Barth quite rightly insists that theological statements are of a logically different type from scientific statements and cannot be reduced to them. Thus he asserts that the world of man is that "in which everything is problematical, everything must first be tested, and certainly nothing is to be tested with the result that it is identical with God"[2] But he takes a more radical step than merely stressing the difference in logical type between scientific statements and theological statements: he suggests that theological statements are completely autonomous: the truth or falsity, meaningfulness and meaninglessness of theological statements are determined by criteria determined by the nature of God Himself, and applicable only to theological statements. No criteria drawn from non-theological statements can be appropriately applied to the theological statements; such statements are "sui generis" and have no logical relations with non-theological statements.

The Logical Positivists were also mistaken to assume that it is possible to lay down the criteria for the meaningfulness and meaninglessness of all statements no matter what context in which they are used. D.Z. Phillips is quite correct in stressing that no a priori rules can be laid

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2. K. Barth. Church Dogmatics. Vol. I p.I p.513

down in advance to determine whether statements, even theological statements, are meaningful or not. Meaning is not identical with verification, as we saw in Chapter I. For in order to discover the meaning of a statement it is necessary to examine the context in which the statement is used. Phillips however spoils his argument by insisting not merely that the meaning of a statement can be discovered by examining its context of use; but also that the truth of a statement can be identified with its public use. Thus he argues that; if the language game of religious belief is played, if theological statements have a use, not only do such statements have a meaning, but they must in some sense be true. The problem in this identification of usage and truth, is that it implies that every living religion which uses a language coherently must be true. But the beliefs of all the religions practised at the present time are not logically compatible. For example, the Moslem belief in one God only is not logically compatible with some tribal religions which practice the worship of many gods. It cannot be true at one and the same time that there is only one God and that there is more than one God. So all these religions cannot be true at one and the same time.

Barth and Phillips therefore have both, consciously or unconsciously, made good points to counter the attack of the Logical Positivists on the meaning of religious language: they have made the point that statements containing the word "God" are logically unique, and cannot be reduced without remainder to non-theological statements. In the very action of doing this, however, they have conceded too much to the Logical Positivists. For in insisting on the autonomy of theological statements, they have logically isolated them from all other types of non-theological statements. Yet an examination of most of the statements contained in the Christian creeds suggest that some theological statements are statements very similar in logical type to fact-claiming statements. For example the

Apostles' creed states of Jesus Christ that he was born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into Hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven, and so on. If such theological statements are in some sense making factual claims, are not the Logical Positivists, and their successors such as A.G.N. Flew justified in insisting that they should be verifiable or falsifiable? For to make a factual claim is to exclude certain possibilities; it is to assert that one state of affairs has occurred rather than any other; that he suffered under Pontius Pilate rather than Herod; that after his death he descended into hell and did not go straight to heaven.

2. Statements of faith and statements of fact

If some fact-claiming statements and some assertions of faith are closely connected in Christian belief and practice then how are these two types of statement logically related? This question can best be answered by considering examples of such statements.

Consider St. Paul's claim in the epistle to the Romans "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners Christ died for us"[3] This statement is making a factual claim that God behaved in a certain way: that is, he showed his love by allowing his son to die for men's sins. This statement taken in the context in which it occurs in the epistle to the Romans entails a historical statement which is either true or false. It entails the statement that Jesus Christ died. For if God showed his love to man through the death of Christ, then Christ must have died. It is not logically possible for Christ not to have died and for God to have shown is love through the death of Christ.

Or consider the claim sometimes made particularly by Christians in the Catholic tradition, that it is more important to attend communion than

3. Romans 5:8

any other service of Christian worship, because the communion service is the only service Christ himself ordered his followers to perform. For according to the first epistle to the Corinthians Jesus said: "Take, eat this is my body which is broken for you: do this in remembrance of me"[4] If it is correct that the reason for the importance of attending communion is that Jesus himself ordered Christians do do so, then it must be the case that Jesus himself gave some fairly explicit instructions about the significance of communion. He need not have said exactly what the gospels and I Corinthians attribute to him; and in any case there is great disagreement as to the correct interpretation of the passages which recount the institution of the Holy Communion. But if the claim is to be true that the reason why a Christian should receive communion is that Jesus ordered him to, then it must be the case that as a matter of fact Jesus issued such an order. For the statement "You must attend communion becauses Jesus himself told you to" entails the statement, "Jesus told you to attend communion" and it is therefore not logically possible for the latter statement to be false, and the former one true.

This close relationship between statements of faith and statements of fact does not apply only to the historical claims of Christianity. Any theological belief which places the locus of God's revelation in, with and under a factual occurrence in the world, places its claims in the same relationship. For example suppose a man asserts "X was cured by God through the agency of the Virgin Mary of cancer, at 12 am yesterday" This statement clearly entails the statement "X was cured of cancer at 12 am yesterday" For it is logically impossible for X to be cured of cancer by God, through the work of the Virgin Mary, and at the same time for X's cancer not to have been cured. The non-occurrence of the cure will falsify the claim that God performed the cure.

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4. I Corinthians II:24

3. Theology: meaning and falsification

The Logical Positivists were mistaken in insisting that if theological statements are to be meaningful they must be verifiable and/or falsifiable For if the meaning of a statement is not identical with the possibility of its verification and/or falsification, but is determined by whether or not the statement has a use, then any statement or set of statements which has a use in a publically spoken language, must have some sort of meaning. Many different systems of theology are in use, in many different publically used languages, and therefore they are meaningful in some sense. Furthermore an unbeliever can come to understand any set of religious beliefs he studies which is logically consistent, in much the same way that it is possible to understand the world of the Hobbits or a piece of science fiction; just because it is possible to understand any consistent series of statement, it does not follow that one or any of them are true.

Theological claims are not however isolated from the possibility of being falsified. This because theological statements in many of the world religions entail factual statements which are either happened or did not happen, and so are verifiable or falsifiable. Thus many of the more important theological statements such as the doctrine of the atonement are falsifiable, in that we can specify at least some of the circumstances under which this doctrine would be false - that is if Christ was never crucified.

Thus some theological statements are falsifiable: the falsity of a given factual statement will falsify the theological statement which entails this particular matter of fact. The truth of a given factual statement will not entail the truth of any theological statement however. Even if Jesus in fact died on the cross it does not follow from this that in dying on the cross he reconciled the world to himself (i.e. to God) for to verify the statement that God reconciled the world to

himself on the cross, it is necessary to verify an action of God - and obviously if God is transcendent then his actions are not reducible without loss of meaning to statements about the world, that is statements that can be verified. This problem of how if at all a consistent set of statements about God's action could be verifiable is one to which I can at present see no satisfactory solution.

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