INTERNAL REALISM AND THE REALITY OF GOD

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Abstract. How do religions refer to reality in their language and symbols, and which reality do they envisage and encounter? On the basis of some examples of an understanding of religion without reference to reality, I first answer the question of what 'realism' is. Realism has been an opposite concept to nominalism, idealism, empiricism and antirealism. The paper concentrates especially on the most recent formation of realism in opposition to antirealism. In a second section the consequences for philosophy of religion and theology are considered. How the reality, as it is considered in philosophy of religion and in theology, has to be characterised, if and how this reality is relevant for human beings, and what its relation is to everything else, can only be answered and clarified in a presentation in a language that is specific for this reality, the reality of God.

If we look on the manifold phenomena of the various religions then one of the questions we are confronted with is how they refer to reality and which reality we envisage and encounter in them. In their respective lives human beings relate themselves and their world to God, to a wholeness, a first cause and final goal or another form of transcendence – depending on how this is conceived in their respective religion. From there they orient their lives in the world and define their religious identities. Depending on the conception of this religious horizon of reference in the various religions and denominations, the religious identities and orientations of the believers are shaped by different grades of an awareness of their freedom and dependence, and with that by a different awareness of whether realities on earth can be changed or have fatefully to be accepted. In respect to the question of heteronomy and autonomy, religions and their conceptions of the transcendent differ – and with that

in respect to the orientations of religious identities to given origins and backgrounds, which mainly are present in the form of divine laws or promised expectations of a future.

Modern Protestant Christianity for example has very much emphasised that from its conception of the relation of God and world, of creator and creature, follows a specific relation of freedom and dependence in the religious awareness of the believers: in Protestant Christianity the world is conceived to be a space of freedom given by God to human beings, which human beings may explore and organise with reason, which as well is given by God. The sticking to the freedom of human beings within the world is grounded in the belief that God himself in his relation to the world is free. Therefore the reference of the religious identity in Protestant Christianity and its orientation to freedom is in the first instance a result of God's freedom, who lets the believers participate in his reality.

In other religions and other denominations, the religious identity of believers is formed differently and believers orient themselves differently within the world as in Protestant Christianity. It is exactly this diversity of religious orientation of human beings and the plurality of religious identities which raises the question of whether the religious awareness of human beings refers at all to reality, or whether it represents rather products of human culture, which have been developed in the course of history in order to cope with daily life.

There is a prominent opinion in the discussions about religious plurality that religions do not refer to reality but articulate specific attitudes and preferences in respect to reality. But then it seems to be the task to interpret religious articulations and practices in reference to the respective cultural, moral and ideological beliefs, or in reference to the emotions of religious people. Religious articulations and practices then are not about a reality but the subjective point of view of human beings on themselves and their world.[1]

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[1] In the following considerations I shall use material from former publications of mine, especially: H.-P. Großhans, *Theologischer Realismus: Ein sprachphilosophischer Beitrag zur einer theologischen Sprachlehre* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996); H.-P. Großhans, 'Die Wirklichkeit Gottes in der Debatte zwischen Realismus und Anti-Realismus', in: *Metaphysik und Religion: Die Wiederentdeckung eines Zusammenhanges*, ed. by H. Deuser (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2007), pp. 102-118; H.-P. Großhans, Art. Realismus: II. Religionsphilosophisch, RGG[4], Bd. 7 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), p. 74; H.-P. Großhans, Art. Realismus: III. Fundamentaltheologisch, RGG[4], Bd. 7 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), pp. 74-76.

I. RELIGION WITHOUT REFERENCE TO REALITY?

I want to illustrate what it means to understand religion without reference to reality with two positions: with the understanding of religion to be a language game, inspired by Wittgenstein; and with the understanding, which has some popularity in present day Protestant theology, of religion to be an interpretation of life.

1.1. Religions being an interpretation of life

Following Dietrich Korsch, in order to act man has to interpret. 'For acting, concepts of aims become necessary, as well as symbols of the motives for acting and of the ways of achieving aims, symbols for the ability of in fact achieving aims.'[2] Religious interpretations – implicit or explicit – combine assumptions about the continuous backgrounds and frameworks of acting with the process of acting and the life of the actor. With them is presented 'a figurative overall context ... which provides a horizon for acting'. This is an act of definition: in the defined horizon human beings orient themselves in life.

In that process religious interpretations cannot be without objectivisations. 'Ideas about seemingly objective realities are formed; images of seemingly ulterior worlds; metaphors which bring to mind the connection of this and that other world. But these objects don't want to claim objective realities, don't want to describe. Instead, they are *important points of orientation* for us in our world, easily coexisting with other attempts of determining our place in the world ... That becomes apparent especially by realising that the function of giving orientation is much more important than that of apparent factual claims.'[3]

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[2] 'Mit dem Handeln werden Vorstellungen über Ziele nötig, Sinnbilder für die Motive des Handelns und die Wege zum Ziel, Symbole für die Fähigkeit, Ziele auch erreichen zu können.' D. Korsch, *Dogmatik im Grundriß: Eine Einführung in die christliche Deutung menschlichen Lebens mit Gott* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), p. 192.

[3] 'Es werden Vorstellungen entwickelt von scheinbar objektiven Gegebenheiten; Bilder von scheinbar jenseitigen Welten; Metaphern, die den Zusammenhang dieser und jener Welt zu Bewußtsein bringen. Aber diese Gegenstände sind gar keine in einem neutral-konstatierenden Sinn. Sondern sie sind *Eckpunkte der Orientierung* unserer selbst in der Welt; durchaus koexistierend mit anderen Ansätzen und Versuchen, unseren Ort in der Welt zu bestimmen ... Dies zeigt sich vor allem darin, daß die Orientierungsfunktion viel wichtiger ist als die vermeintliche Sachverhaltsbehauptungen.' Ibid., p. 193. In that understanding, for example the Apostolic Creed is a paradigmatic example of religious interpretation: 'It is comprehensive in the sense that it looks in metaphorical language for the foundation and the end of the world in God. What ever we do, we do it in a world

But then the question has to be raised: how real is the horizon, which is mediated by a religion, to human life and acting, and as well to one's own self-interpretation of human life? What is real within all the ideas that are used in the process of a religious interpretation of life?[4]

We find the opinion, as in Korsch, that the advantage of an understanding of religions as interpretation of life is to avoid claims that religions assert objective realities much clearer in the writings of Wilhelm Gräb: 'Religious phrases about the world, about human history and about our own life explicitly want to be understood metaphorically ... They have meaning for us and give meaning to our lives only when we do not understand them as claims about objective realities but as interpretations which make it possible for us to ascribe meaning to the world, to nature and to history, which are not meaningful by themselves.'[5] What is articulated in religions does not express reality, but prescribes sense to reality in nature and history.

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which is made accessible for us by God. And whatever happens to us, we're never anywhere else than in God's hand. All acting, with its presuppositions and contexts as well as with its possible results and even last consequences, is held by God.' ['Es ist einmal *umfassend*, sofern es in seiner symbolischen Sprache den Grund und das Ende der Welt bei Gott sucht. Was immer wir tun, wir tun es in einer von Gott uns eröffneten Welt. Und was immer mit uns geschieht, wir befinden uns niemals woanders als in Gottes Hand. Alles Handeln ist sowohl in seinen materialen Bezügen und Anschlüssen als auch in seinen möglichen Folgen, ja letzten Konsequenzen durch Gott gehalten.' (ibid.)]

[4] If one looks into the details of Dietrich Korsch's arguments one may nevertheless get the impression, that these interpretations are made on the basis of proposed realities. Korsch speaks about God as if he is active and effective. 'God is conceived to be the *triune God* because he is in *motion*, in himself and beyond himself.' ['Gott wird darum gerade als der *dreieine Gott* gedacht, weil er sich in einer *Bewegung* befindet, in sich selbst und über sich selbst hinaus.' (ibid., p. 194).] Or: 'The unity of Father and Son is not a sealed unified whole, but involves human beings in divine life.' ['Die Einheit von Vater und Sohn ist ... nichts in sich Geschlossenes, sondern zieht die Menschen ... ins göttliche Leben hinein.' (ibid.)] In such sentences God seems to be an effective power, to which human beings relate themselves in images and ideas and in reference to which they interpret their own lives.

[5] 'Die Sätze des Glaubens über die Welt, über die Geschichte der Menschen und die unseres eigenen Lebens [wollen] von uns explizit in ihrem symbolischen Sinn verstanden sein ... Sie haben für uns nur Sinn und sie geben uns in unserem Leben nur Sinn, wenn wir sie nicht als objektive Wirklichkeitsbehauptungen nehmen, sondern bewußt als Deutungen, vermöge deren wir die Welt, die Natur und die Geschichte, die an sich keinen Sinn haben, in einen solchen für uns überführen können.' W. Gräb, *Lebensgeschichten – Lebensentwürfe – Sinndeutungen: Eine Praktische Theologie gelegter Religion* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2000), p. 18.

The understanding of religion as interpretation of life via prescription of sense is programmatically proposed by Ulrich Barth. According Ulrich Barth, religion is interpretation of experience in the horizon of the idea of the absolute ('Deutung von Erfahrung im Horizont der Idee des Unbedingten.')[6] In religion, human beings interpret their experience within the world by moving it into another horizon, the horizon of the idea of the absolute. Barth uses here Paul Tillich's famous definition of religion as being the relation to that which is of ultimate concern to us. Religion is a specific relation of the human mind to the ultimate and absolute: a relation that is characterized by a final and unreserved concern. We make our experiences in the horizon of the conditional. In religion we subordinate these experiences to an interpretation by moving them into the horizon of the idea of the unconditional and absolute. According to Ulrich Barth, this horizon of the unconditional is itself a pure product of interpretation. This horizon follows from an interpretation of human awareness and consciousness, and the analyses of its given structure. In being a pure product of interpretation the dimension of the unconditional and absolute can surely 'constitute an independent semantic level, but no argument can be found for the existence of an extensional dimension which is correlated to this intensional dimension.'[7] Religious consciousness and awareness is not concerned with understanding objects, but is a second order change of perspectives ('Perspektivenwechsel zweiter Stufe').[8] Religion therefore is not concerned with knowledge, but with a 'specific kind of human interpretation, i.e. interpretation of reality in the horizon of infinity, wholeness, eternity and necessity.'[9] These four transcendental dimensions of the idea of the unconditional absolute satisfy a 'function of endowment with meaning' ('Sinnanreicherungs- oder Sinnstiftungsfunktion'), but do

[6] U. Barth, 'Was ist Religion?', in: *Religion in der Moderne*, ed. by U. Barth (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), p. 10.

[7] '... eine eigenständige Sinn- und Bedeutungsebene konstituieren, für eine diesem intensionalen Bezug des Bewußtseins korrelierende extensionale Dimension sei jedoch so kein Argument zu finden.' R. Barth, *Absolute Wahrheit und endliches Wahrheitsbewußtsein*: *Das Verhältnis von logischem und theologischem Wahrheitsbegriff – Thomas von Aquin, Kant, Fichte und Frege:* Religion in Philosophy and Theology, 13 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), p. 56.

[8] U. Barth, 'Was ist Religion?', p. 10.

[9] '... spezifische Form menschlicher Deutungsleistung, nämlich als Deutung der Wirklichkeit im Horizont ihrer Unendlichkeits-, Ganzheits-, Ewigkeits- und Notwendigkeitsdimension'. Ibid., p. 14.

not give a foundation to the idea of real and ideal conditioning. Religion is a phenomenon on the intensional level, not on an extensional one. Religion does not want to inform about an ideal or real foundation and reason of human life or the world, but prescribes sense to reality which is experienced as nature and history.

1.2. Religion as a language game

The second conception of religion, which I want to hint to here in our symposium, is often used in the sense that religion is not about objective claims about reality. According to Ludwig Wittgenstein, cultural and religious diversity has to be understood as a plurality of language games. This is a widespread opinion.

According to Wittgenstein, the meaning of an expression is constituted through the rules of its use in concrete social situations. This is similar to the meaning or function of a figure in a game, which is given through the rules of the game. If we are asking for the meaning of an expression, then we have to examine the rules of the language game in which it is used. We then have to analyse its use in concrete social situations and cultural contexts. It is a popular understanding of Wittgenstein's concept of language games that according to him we are always concerned with a language as a closed system, in which an expression has its meaning only in the relations immanent in that system and as expressions of human beings in specific situations. Consequently, we have to sort expressions into the system of a language game and to relate it to the situation of its use. Then we find out how human beings understand themselves in a specific situation and how they act in that specific situation.

If we follow this understanding of Wittgenstein's late philosophy for philosophy of religion, then religious expressions and assertions are reduced to 'expressions of individual ways of life' ('Ausdrucksphänomene individueller Lebensweisen') – as Falk Wagner formulated.[10] But then – according Wagner – we have the problem that the theories of religion which are constructed in the horizon of Wittgenstein's late philosophy are not able 'to determine the claimed cognitive content of faith because they make it dependent on autonomous language games.'[11] Religious

[10] F. Wagner, Was ist Religion?: Studien zu ihrem Begriff und Thema in Geschichte und Gegenwart (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Mohn, 1986), p. 439.

[11] 'den von einer Glaubensansicht beanspruchten kognitiven Gehalt zu bestimmen, weil sie ihn von autonomen Sprachspielen abhängig [machen]' Ibid., p. 437.

language games depict no objectivity, but are only about 'Subjective acts of faith' ('subjektive Glaubensvollzüge'). We can find similar judgments about the relevance of Wittgenstein's late philosophy for philosophy of religion in many other theologians and philosophers of religion.

What Wagner criticises seems to others to be the advantage of the concept of language games. Because with this theory we seem to be able to conceive the cultural and religious plurality in a radical way. And: If religious expressions and actions include no claims about reality, then the discussion about reality has no religious dimension.

In my analysis, all these understandings of a Wittgensteinian philosophy of religion have not gone to the necessary depth of Wittgenstein's philosophy. Because Wittgenstein as well has formulated in one of his remarks: 'Not empiricism yet realism in philosophy, that's the hardest thing.'[12]

II. WHAT IS 'REALISM'?

We find a 'realism' in the history of philosophy and theology at various times. According to Paul Tillich, realism is a philosophical fighting word.[13] What at a time was understood as 'realism' becomes clear especially if we look on the respective alternatives. Alternatives to realism have been nominalism, idealism, empiricism, and antirealism.

Most times in its history, theology preferred realistic conceptions. The dominant ontological position was that there is a God independent of our conceptions, knowledge, or assertions of God. From this followed epistemologically and semantically the position that God should not be identified with our conceptions, knowledge, or assertions of God. It is in that sense that Joseph Runzo defined theological realism (some years ago): Ontologically theological realism is 'the view that there is a transcendent divine reality independent of human thought', respectively the belief, 'that there exists a transcendent divine reality, independent *at least*

[12] 'Nicht Empirie und doch Realismus in der Philosophie, das ist das schwerste.' L. Wittgenstein, *Bemerkungen über die Grundlagen der Mathematik*, ed. by G. E. M. Anscombe and others: Werkausgabe, Bd. 6, 4th edn. (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1991), p. 325.

[13] Cf. P. Tillich, 'Gläubiger Realismus I', in Philosophie und Schicksal: Schriften zur Erkenntnislehre und Existenzphilosophie, ed. by P. Tillich: Gesammelte Werke IV (Stuttgart: Evangelisches Verlegs-Werk, 1961), pp. 77-87 (p. 77).

in part of human thought, action and attitudes'.[14] God is then conceived as a real object, which does not exist because it is intended from us as an object.

But in difference to metaphysical realism it is acknowledged epistemologically and semantically that in respect to the reality of God and the concept of God 'the *human* mind contributes to the very content of what is perceived and so known'.[15]

Realism has a long history, in which its definition and the opposing conceptions always again changed. For example, Hegel in his 'History of Philosophy' noticed a different understanding of realism in scholastic times – to which nominalism was the opposing conception – and in his own time, which was distinguished from idealism.[16] According to Hegel, in scholastic philosophy realism was about the ontological status

[14] J. Runzo, 'Introduction', in *Is God Real?* ed. by J. Runzo: Library of Philosophy and Religion (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993), pp. I-XXIV (p. XIII).

[15] Ibid., p. XIV.

[16] Hegel formulated the difference that way: 'Those who maintain that universals exist independently from the thinking subject and independent from individual things, and that ideas are the essence of things are called realists – in sharp contrast to what is called realism nowadays. In our use, this term designates the philosophical position that things independently have real existence; what is denied by idealism. Later the philosophical view that only ideas – as opposed to individual things – are real was called idealism. In scholastics realism meant that universals were independent real entities: ideas were incorruptible in contrast to material things, ideas were immutable and the only real entities. In contrast the nominalists, also called formalists, maintained that universals were only concepts, subjective generalisations, products of the human mind; when one used categories, etc., that were only words, formulas, made up by the human soul, totally subjective, concepts for and made up by us – only the individual was real. ' ['Diejenigen, welche behaupteten, daß die Universalien außer dem denkenden Subjekte unterschieden vom einzelnen Dinge ein existierendes Reales seyen, das Wesen der Dinge allein die Idee sey, hießen Realisten, – hier in ganz entgegengesetzem Sinne gegen das, was heutiges Tags Realismus heißt. Dieser Ausdruck hat bei uns nämlich den Inhalt, daß die Dinge, wie sie unmittelbar sind, eine wirkliche Existenz haben; und der Idealismus steht dem entgegen. Idealismus nannte man später die Philosophie, welche den Ideen allein Realität zuschrieb, indem er behauptet, daß die Dinge, wie sie in der Einzelnheit erscheinen, nicht ein Wahrhaftes sind. Der Realismus der Scholastiker behauptet, daß das Allgemeine ein Selbständiges, Fürsichseyendes, Existierendes sey: die Ideen sind nicht der Zerstörung unterworfen, wie die natürlichen Dinge, unveränderlich, und allein ein wahres Seyn. Wogegen die Anderen, die Nominalisten oder Formalisten, behaupteten, das Universale sey nur Vorstellung, subjektive Verallgemeinerung, Produkt des denkenden Geistes; wenn man Gattungen u.s.f. formire, so seyen dies nur Namen, Formelles, ein von der Seele Gebildetes und Subjektives, Vorstellungen für uns, die wir machen – nur das Individuelle sey das Reale'] (G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, ed. by

of general terms. That realism assumed the reality of the general in (individual) things. In contrast nominalism accepted only the reality of the individual objects.

The conceptions were very different in the time of Hegel. There realism was the concept that individual objects (things) have their real existence only in their immediate being. The source of this understanding of realism was Kant's 'Critique of Pure Reason'. In Kant, realism is concerned with the question of the existence (and the mode of existence) of the temporal-spatial world and the question about the relation between appearance and being in itself. In the first edition of the 'Critique of Pure Reason', Kant criticised transcendental realism, which holds that space and time are in itself (that is, independent from human sensibility) given. 'The transcendental realist construes appearances as things themselves which exist independently from us and our sensibility.'[17] For Kant the problem was that pure perceptions are made things as such ('*bloße Vorstellungen* zu Sachen an sich selbst.')[18] His own position, opposing transcendental realism, Kant called 'transcendental idealism', which he combined with an 'empirical realism' ('empirischer Realism'), expressing in it the belief that the existence and order of the temporal-spatial world of experience do not depend on the empirical subject, but are nevertheless in a constitutive relation with human consciousness.

Originally, *analytical philosophy*, in developing realism, did not built on Kant. Kant did not become important for realism again – in a relevant sense – before the 1970s. In analytical philosophy, a first form of realism was conceived as anti-idealism. This happened in the 'Refutation of Idealism' of G.E. Moore,[19] where he destroyed Berkeley's motto 'esse is percipi'.[20] Characteristic for this type of realism is the belief

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H. Glockner: Sämtliche Werke in 20 Bänden, einer Hegel-Monographie und einem Hegel-Lexikon, 19, 3 vols (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1928), III, pp. 181-2.

[17] 'Der transcendentale Realist stellt sich also äußere Erscheinungen ... als Dinge an sich selbst vor, die unabhängig von uns und unserer Sinnlichkeit existiren.' I. Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, ed. by W. Weischedel: Werke in sechs Bänden, 2 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1956), pp. 375-6 (A 369).

[18] Ibid., pp. 460-1 (A 491).

[19] Cf. G. E. Moore, 'The Refutation of Idealism', in *Philosophical Studies*, ed. by G. E. Moore: International library of psychology philosophy and scientific method (London: Kegan Paul, 1922), pp. 1-30.

[20] Cf. G. Berkeley, *A Treatise concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, ed. by A. A. Luce and T. E. Jessop: The Works of George Berkeley, 2: Bibliotheca Britannica philosophica (London: Nelson, 1949), pp. 1-113 (p. 42) (I, § 3).

that the existence and nature of the world are given independent from the human mind and consciousness. Moore emphasised the distinction of an act of consciousness and its object, and claimed that the object exists independent from the act of consciousness (which may be an act of perceiving, conceiving, etc.). He emphasised that not only is the perception of something the object of cognition, but the existence of the object itself. And finally he emphasised that truth and falsity refer not to beliefs but to the objects of belief.

The realism of Logical Atomism was criticised strongly in the decades that followed. Paradigmatically for this we can call to mind the development in Wittgenstein's philosophy, but also the Empiricism and Positivism of the 20th century. It was then in the follow up of 'Ordinary-Language-Philosophy' that realism appeared once again on the philosophical agenda.

This new type of realism followed from problems in the philosophy of language. Here realism generally claims that the names and terms, which are used in a theory about a defined area (of science or life), refer to objects (things), which exist independent from human thinking and speaking.[21] This general position is combined with the claims, (1) that truth is independent from rational justification, (2) that there is strict bivalence – a proposition is either true or false – and a correspondence theory of truth is possible, and (3) that the semantics of our sentences have to be conceived as consequences of the objective conditions of truth. This development of a realism in the philosophy of language was supported by a parallel discussion in the theory of science, in which a 'scientific realism' was developed.

The motives for these new conceptions of realism in the philosophy of language and the philosophy of science came mainly from the critique of Logical Empiricism and Positivism respectively. According to Hilary Putnam, Logical Empiricism misses the idea of a correspondence of cognition respective knowledge and reality, but as well an idea to orient the meaning of lingual expressions to reality. According to Putnam, positivistic and empiricistic theories of meaning are characterised by two assumptions:

(1) 'That knowing the meaning of a term is just a matter of being in a certain psychological state'.

[21] Cf. M. Kober, Art. Realismus: I. philosophisch, RGG[4], Bd. 7 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), pp. 72-4.

(2) 'That the meaning of a term (in the sense of "intension") determines its extension (in the sense that sameness of intension entails sameness of extension).'[22]

In Empiricism – according Putnam – the extension of an expression is identified with its intension in the individual use of language. The meaning of an expression in the mind (or consciousness) of its user defines its extension – and not the other way round. This is a different position to those understandings of religion as interpretation of life and prescribing sense, which I referred to in my first section. Empiricism does not claim that the expressions we use have no extension at all. Empiricism knows an extension of expressions, but understands it as given with the intension of the use of language. This position was criticised with the motto: '"meanings" just ain't in the head'.[23] The meaning of an expression is given with its reference, with that to which it refers.

With the emphasis on the reference of an expression, the reality, which is addressed in the expression, becomes present beyond its sensual appearance, its impressions, or its theoretical reconstructions. The 'other' of language, which does not follow from the inner self-references of language and its semantical interplay of meanings, can now be conceived as an essential part of language and human talking. In philosophy of language the problem of indefiniteness is addressed with the expression 'reality', to which we refer with language, although we cannot fully grasp and describe it and whose existence is independent from our referring and talking about it.

If we relate these general considerations to 'God', then it becomes thinkable and conceivable that the lingual predications of God, which necessarily are not fully satisfying, and also manifold human God-talk may refer to God – a reference which is not identical with its lingual form. Like other words the word 'God' articulates a reference, which is not identical with the respective human consciousness of God and which does not only refer to this consciousness.

But does this model not lead directly to a relativistic scepticism?

An example from philosophy of language which supports such a suspicion is 'cultural relativism', like Benjamin Lee Whorf originally

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[22] H. Putnam, 'The meaning of "meaning"', in, *Mind, Language und Reality*, ed. by H. Putnam: Philosophical Papers, 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 215-71 (p. 219).

[23] Ibid., p. 227.

proposed it: a position which is especially widespread among the proponents of a pluralistic theory of religions. According to Whorf, language in the first instance is 'a classification and arrangement of the *stream of sensory experience* which results in a certain world-order'.[24] Every natural language represents a world view (Weltbild), which is a specific interpretation of all the unformed sensual experiences, which as a kind of raw material is the basis of all human languages.[25] In respect to religion we then could assume unformed religious experiences of human beings, which are conceptualised by the various religious and denominational traditions and with this given a specific form. We find this model for example in John Hick's pluralistic theory of religions: the transcendent, which Hick calls 'The REAL', is the joint point of reference of all religions and of all religious experience, which in the various religions is articulated and conceived in various different ways and forms.

This model more or less has been overcome – at least theoretically. Donald Davidson called it the 'third dogma of empiricism' and criticised it decisively.[26] The relation of language and reality has to be conceived differently. It was Wittgenstein's special interest – in my analysis – to look for the real within its lingual expression. And this is exactly the point of

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[24] B. L. Whorf, 'The Punctual and Segmentative Aspects of Verbs in Hopi', in *Language, Thought and Reality: Selected Writings*, ed. by J. B. Caroll, Foreword by S. Chase: Technology Press books in the social sciences (Cambridge: Technology Press of Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1956), pp. 51-56 (p. 55).

[25] This interpretation of the world according Whorf shows that every natural language entails an implicit metaphysics. 'The Hopi language and culture conceals a *metaphysics*, such as our so-called naive view of space and time does, or as the relativity theory does; yet it is a different metaphysics from either. In order to describe the structure of the universe as according to the Hopi, it is necessary to attempt ... to make explicit this metaphysics, properly describable only in the Hopi language, by means of an approximation expressed in our own language' (B. L. Whorf, 'An American Indian model of the universe', in *Language, Thought and Reality*, ed. by J. B Caroll, pp. 57-64 (p. 58)).

[26] D. Davidson, 'On the very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme', in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, ed. by D. Davidson: Collected Essays, 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), pp. 183-198 (p. 189). It is the third dogma of empiricism following the two dogmas, which *Quine* has ascribed to empiricism; cf. W. V. O. Quine, 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism', in *From a Logical Point of View: 9 logico-philosophical Essays*, ed. by W. V. O. Quine, 2nd rev. edn. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univiversity Press 1980), pp. 20-46. The first dogma of empiricism is the fundamental separation of analytical truth, which is independent of facts, and synthetic truth, which is grounded in facts. The second dogma of empiricism is reductionism: 'the belief that each meaningful statement is equivalent to some logical construct upon terms which refer to immediate experience' (ibid., p. 20).

Wittgenstein's remark, that realism is the most difficult in philosophy. This is because the reference to reality cannot be separated from the language we use.

According to Putnam, from these considerations it follows that: 'the truth can be told in language games that we actually play when language is working.'[27] I cannot go into the details of all the related problems and the extensive philosophical discussion on that issue. Here I only want to hint to the claim that there is not much justification for the assumption that the real world itself gives us the way how the world has to be ordered into objects, situations, properties, etc.

This point was emphasised in anti-realism, which especially was put forward by Michael Dummett.[28] If the real world does not tell us how she should be ordered in language, then the meanings can only be constituted by the way in which they are formed, and the truth of a proposition can then only be justified within a language. Truth then cannot be a correspondence to an assumed reality, but truth is 'an idealisation of rational acceptability'.[29] The only criterion 'for what is a fact ... [is] what it is *rational* to accept'[30] – and this in the context of a language which is used in a specific discourse.

Already Wittgenstein has seen that every understanding of language and human talking is accompanied by ontological and epistemological assumptions and implications. But he insisted that we can and should not separate these metaphysical issues from the factual and actual talking of people and from their use of language, and therefore should consider these issues not separately, because they are intrinsically related to the used and spoken language. These metaphysical issues cannot adequately be conceived beyond and independent from the use of language when human beings are talking. Therefore the word 'reality' as well has its place in the human use of language. We operate with this expression.

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[27] H. Putnam, *Ethics without Ontology* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 22.

[28] Cf. M. Dummett, *Truth and other Enigmas*, 2nd edn. (London: Duckworth 1992), p. XL; M. Dummett, *The Logical Basis of Metaphysics* (London: Duckworth, 1991); M. Dummett, *The Seas of Language* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993); M. Dummett, *Truth and the Past*, Foreword by A. Bilgrami: Columbia themes in philosophy (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

[29] H. Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History*, 9th edn. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 55.

[30] Ibid., p. X.

Now, in talking about reality we articulate in the use of language the indefiniteness with which every language, every talking, and every knowledge is confronted. If we talk about reality, for example, the experience that is expressed is that we are talking with others about something, and this 'something' is not identical with that which we have said about it in the language. We talk about something and we refer together to this 'something', despite the fact that we communicate to each other not the same but different knowledge. Therefore we have to discuss whether we talk about the same 'something'. To fix this joint reference depends now strongly on the terminology we use. This points to the fact that we talk and conceive this 'something' not only differently, but that this 'something' is what it is in the respective language and terminology. Surely, what we address as reality exists not because we address it and talk about it. But reality is, for us, how we know, conceive, and formulate it in language. It is exactly this difference which makes it possible to evaluate critically, in reference to reality, what we have come to know, what we conceive and formulate as real. We operate with this critical distinction permanently. It is reasonable to address what we talk about as reality, which precedes our talking and which is not identical with our talking. Look for examples in situations of communication: An opinion surely can with authority be confronted with another opinion. But such a dissent is more convincing if the contradicting opinion gets its authority from its reference to the addressed reality. What we formulate in discourses as objects is at the same time constructed and discovered. The insights of other opinions are convincing if they create discoveries about the object that is addressed.

III. CONSEQUENCES FOR PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION AND THEOLOGY

We can illustrate the consequences of my considerations for the discussion in religious studies and cultural anthropology in the context of Wittgenstein's philosophy. This discussion was about 'primitive societies' (with the paradigm of the African people of Azande) and Evans-Pritchard's notion of magic, which was related to the concept of reality and science in modern Western societies.[31] Despite the explicit

[31] Cf. E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1937). Evans-Pritchard has been critically discussed by Peter Winch.

hermeneutical principle for an investigation of primitive societies like the Azande, which stated that 'in order to understand the Azande conceptions we must understand them in terms of how they are taken by the Azande themselves and in terms of their own social structure, i.e. forms of life',[32] Evans-Pritchard nevertheless claimed that – compared with Western cultures – the Azande followed an illusion, because there is no magic and there are no witches: 'Our scientific account of these matters is in accord with objective reality while the Azande magical beliefs are not.'[33]

Peter Winch also had the opinion that the perceptions and conceptions of human beings have to be verified 'by reference to something independent – some reality'.[34] But nevertheless he was convinced that it is wrong 'to characterise the scientific in terms of that which is "in accord with objective reality"'.[35] We cannot simply assume and claim that *our* scientific perceptions and conceptions correspond with reality, how it really is. Because the research on the culture of the Azande shows that they have a totally different understanding of reality. The verification of the independent reality is not specific only for the natural sciences. It is a not justified presupposition that the scientific discourse is the only paradigm, which functions as a verification of the objective adequacy of other discourses.

But already Wittgenstein has critically discussed a work of social anthropology in the tradition of the enlightenment. Wittgenstein has commented on the at his time popular book of James George Frazer: J. G. Frazer, *The New Golden Bough: A New Abridgement of the Classic Work*, ed. and with notes and foreword by T. H. Gaster, 2nd edn. (New York: Phillips, 1965). But Wittgenstein did not read the edition in 12 Volumes, but only the short version of Fraser's study in one volume: J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion: Abridged Edition*, 5th edn. (London: Macmillan, 1925). Cf. L. Wittgenstein, 'Bemerkungen über Frazers Golden Bough', in L. Wittgenstein, *Vortrag über Ethik und andere kleine Schriften*, ed. by J. Schulte: Suhrkamp-Taschenbuch Wissenschaft, 770 (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1989), pp. 29-46.

[32] K. Nielsen, 'Wittgensteinian Fideism', *Philosophy*, 42 (1967), 191-209 (p. 198).

[33] Ibid.

[34] P. Winch, 'Understanding a Primitive Society', in: *Religion and Understanding*, ed. by D. Z. Phillips (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967), pp. 9-42 (p. 12).

[35] Ibid., p. 11. Sigrid Fretlöh has analysed the relation of rationality and relativism in Winch, Wittgenstein and Quine and especially considered the problem of translation: cf. S. Fretlöh, *Relativismus versus Universalismus. Zur Kontroverse über Verstehen und Übersetzen in der angelsächsischen Sprachphilosophie: Winch, Wittgenstein, Quine*: Aachener Schriften zur Wissenschaftstheorie, Logik und Sprachphilosophie, 3 (Aachen: Alano-Verlag, 1989).

If we follow this conception, then the reality of God can 'only be seen from the religious tradition in which the concept of God is used'.[36] The use of religious language is the form of life in which the talk of the reality of God has to be located – as the magic of the Azande has its place in their form of life in which magic practices are done. The respective form of life 'guarantees intelligibility and reality to the concepts in question'.[37]

There is no clear sense in general questions like 'what is real?' or 'what is reality in itself?'. 'When asked in a completely general way they are meaningless. We can only raise the problem of the reality of something within a form of life. There is no completely extra-linguistic or context-independent conception of reality in accordance with which we might judge forms of life.'[38] In consequence, the normally assumed relation of language and reality has to be modified. It is not the reality which gives sense and meaning to language but 'what is real and what is unreal shows itself *in* the sense that language has'.[39] Even the distinction between real and unreal is one which we make within our language. Every language knows this distinction. But how exactly it is distinguished between that which is real and that which is not real, this becomes clear in the actual use of language. This use of language is ignored if we generally verify a form of life with a specific concept of reality.

This applies as well to the religious talk about reality. In its articulations in Christian faith a specific understanding of reality is expressed. Christian talk about God may be characterised through the understanding that the reality of God cannot fully and sufficiently be known and asserted. Human knowledge and language cannot fully grasp God's reality and so remains indefinite. Therefore the reality of God always again challenges human beings to new knowledge, thoughts and words. The triune God that Christians believe in, who is revealed through and in language, then has to be conceived in that sense as real, as he is asserted in the language of Christian faith, which began in the Holy Scriptures and which is used by and in the Christian church. Only from the meaning, which is defined in these texts and usage, is the reference of Christian God-talk guided.

If Christian believers talk about the reality of God they assert not an isolated being of God – in the sense of a deictic ontology. Rather

[36] P. Winch, *Understanding a Primitive Society*, p. 12.
[37] K. Nielsen, *Wittgensteinian Fideism*, p. 199.
[38] Ibid.
[39] P. Winch, *Understanding a Primitive Society*, p. 13.

the presence of the story and the relations of God, which he has with himself, with the world and with the human being, are asserted. To refer to this reality of God would not be possible without the language which expresses this reality. In respect to the reality of God therefore it is not the concern to fix in an abstract way the referent of the God-talk in the sense of its extension. The concern is rather, that in that case 'vivid language wins through' ('sich lebendige Sprache bei uns durchsetzt')[40] – as Ernst Fuchs formulated it. This language introduces a listening human being into the matter, which is put forward in this language. In the case of the triune God something real, a reality, refers via language to the presence and asserts itself: that is, God's story and history with himself, the world and the human being.

How this reality has to be characterised, if and how this reality is relevant for human beings, and what its relation is to everything else, which reality is asserted in our manifold discourses, this can only be answered and clarified in a presentation and depiction in language, which is specific for this reality, the reality of God. In that respect, the trinitarian understanding of God is central in Christian faith. Starting with the trinitarian name of God it has to be developed, what in Christian faith is understood as real in respect of God and his relation to the world and the human being. This concerns the reality of the creative power of the free God; this concerns the reality of the reconciling love, in which God binds himself to the human being and his world; and this concerns the reality of the moving power of God's spirit, who saves the human being and his world. It is the claim of Christian faith to refer to this reality of the triune God, to define Christian identity in reference to it and to orient human beings with that reference in the world.

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[40] E. Fuchs, *Marburger Hermeneutik*: Hermeneutische Untersuchungen zur Theologie 9 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1968), p. 239.