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SPECIAL ISSUE

PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THEOLOGICAL REALISM

GUEST EDITORS

THOMAS M. SCHMIDT

Goethe-University Frankfurt

&

OLIVER WIERTZ

Graduate School of Philosophy and Theology St. Georgen, Frankfurt

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EDITORIAL

There are many reasons for the nasty ditch between analytic philosophy of religion (including analytic theology) on the one hand and theology and so called continental philosophy of religion on the other. Perhaps the most important reason for the rift between these two camps has to do with the issue of theological realism. In the eyes of most analytic philosophers of religion, theologians and 'continental' philosophers of religion are antirealists or have at least strongly antirealist inclinations. Defenders of theological realism view nonrealist positions as illegitimate and unnecessary reductionist moves to safeguard religious beliefs. Viewed from the perspective of most continental philosophers, theological realists are in the grip of scientism and a wrong view of the nature of religious discourse.

If one aims at bridging the gap between these two camps one cannot avoid the question of theological realism. But one has to be suspicious of these labels as one should always when it comes to –isms in philosophy. Speaking of '*the* issue of realism' is overly simplistic because in fact there are a family of different topics comprehended under the umbrella term 'realism'. One should at least distinguish between the question of the semantic status of religious utterances and the question of the ontological status of possible objects of reference of religious language. Even if one concentrates on the second aspect of the realism issue there are different kinds of realism/antirealism, which must be distinguished carefully: ontological realism, according to which the world is independent of the human mind; semantic realism, according to which a proposition is true if and only if it corresponds (in a wide sense) to reality; epistemic realism, according to which reality is not totally unrecognizable by human beings; and 'existential antirealism', sometimes called 'irrealism', which means the denial of the existence of certain beings.

Furthermore realism is not an all or nothing matter. You need not acknowledge all kinds of realism (or antirealism, respectively); realism/antirealism allow for different grades (e.g. different grades of independence of the world from the human mind) and scope (e.g. the combination of antirealism in philosophy of mathematics with a realist stance in respect to religion); and even in a single area one need not be a through and through realist: one can be a committed realist concerning all central Christian doctrines but take an irrealist view of some special doctrines like the limbo.

In one way or another all the following articles evince the complexity and subtlety of the issue of theological realism.

Pihlström not only clears the ground by making helpful distinctions and terminological clarifications but also introduces the term of 'recognition' into the realism debate. Schönbaumsfeld argues against the pernicious misunderstanding of Wittgenstein as a relativistic noncognitivist and defends the intimate but nonreductive relation between the attitude towards a religious belief and its content.

Both Rossi and Jonkers view the rift between continental and analytic philosophy of religion under the aspect of realism. Jonkers criticizes the theoretical character of the realist's approach and replaces it with a practical approach in a broadly Kantian spirit. Rossi also refers to Kant in his plea for methodological and metaphysical modesty which acknowledges the finitude of the human perspective.

Grosshans and Johannesson try out Putnam's middle course between a too strict metaphysical realism and a too strict antirealism. Schlette compares Putnam's stance on theological realism with Mark Johnston's position in the context of the tension between naturalism and theism in late modernity, hinting at the importance of religious experience as motivation for theological realism. In contrast Schärtl argues for a (moderate) antirealist position on the basis of religious experiences after he has identified the mind-independency thesis as the core of realism. On the other hand Gäb's defence of a (semantically) realist theory of the metaphorical meaning of religious language refers to religious experiences as indispensable for a realist theory of religious language. The concept of religious experience in the work of a leading proponent of theological realism is analysed and criticized by Nickel and Schönecker.

With one exception all papers in this issue are based on talks at the Templeton Conference on Analytic Theology: 'Philosophical Perspectives on Theological Realism', in Mainz (9-11 September) 2013. Pihlström's text is based on his presentation at the Second Templeton Summer School 'Philosophical Perspectives on Theological Realism', in Mainz (26 August – 6 September) 2013. Both the conference and summer School were financially supported by the John Templeton Foundation.

We hope that this special issue will help to overcome mutual misunderstandings and to highlight and clarify real disagreements.

Thomas M. Schmidt & Oliver J. Wiertz

NON-METAPHYSICAL REALISM: A DUMMETT-INSPIRED IMPLEMENTATION OF PUTNAM'S INTERNAL REALISM

KARIN JOHANNESSON

University of Uppsala

Abstract. The amount of realist positions put forward by philosophers of religion and theologians is impressive. One can certainly doubt whether there is a need for yet another alternative. However, most realist positions employed in studies on religion fall prey to Hilary Putnam's criticism against metaphysical realism. This gives rise to a dilemma that I aim at solving by introducing yet another realist position, namely non-metaphysical realism.

THE ONSET OF A DILEMMA

Like many proponents of realist positions, I assume that we have need of a philosophical perspective that allows us to conceptualize and discuss utterances made in religious contexts as statements about a reality that exists independently of us and that we humans share with each other. We might not be able to justify those statements. However, such failures should not necessarily lead to the conclusion that the utterances in question are not, properly speaking, statements.

This basic assumption causes a dilemma that I believe we have to come to terms with. It arises within philosophy of religion due to some widely acclaimed arguments in realism debates within other philosophical fields. I will formulate this dilemma in personal terms since I know that not every philosopher of religion struggles with it. Its emergence rests on certain presuppositions.

On the one hand, I think that most believers understand at least some of the claims made in religious contexts as evidence-transcendent truths

concerning a shared independent reality. Consequently, a philosopher of religion aiming at analyzing religious ideas as they, in fact, are understood by believers needs access to a philosophical perspective that suggests that assertions made within religious contexts can be conceptualized in such a way. In addition to this, I believe that we philosophers need access to such a perspective since we at times have to argue that certain claims or certain activities that a particular religious context includes in fact presuppose the truth of some statements about a reality that we share with each other, even if the believers are unaware of this or explicitly deny this. Occasionally, we have to critically discuss such implicit truth-claims since they might have a negative impact on our shared social life, or yield unwanted consequences for the well-being of certain individuals.

On the other hand, I find Hilary Putnam's arguments against the philosophical perspective that he identifies as metaphysical realism convincing. My study of his reasoning caused something of a philosophical conversion in my life. Today, I take it that metaphysical realism is a philosophically untenable perspective that we have to abandon. Unfortunately, it is the most obvious option for those of us who want to conceptualize claims made in religious contexts as statements about a shared independent reality that may be evidence-transcendent truths. For this reason, some philosophers of religion are extremely unwilling to take leave of metaphysical realism. To them it seems as if a rejection of metaphysical realism would deprive us of every possibility to properly construe and justly criticize religious beliefs.

The two horns of my dilemma generate a challenging question. Can we conceptualize claims made in religious contexts as statements about a shared independent reality, statements that might be true even if we are unable to justify them, without presupposing metaphysical realism, at least not in a form that is affected by Putnam's criticism? In the following, I will elaborate an affirmative answer to this question by applying the non-metaphysical realist position that I identify and recommend. I will organize my argument in the following way: Initially, I will present metaphysical realism as it is understood by Putnam and me. Then I will summarize two lines of reasoning that I identify in Putnam's arguments against metaphysical realism and that I find convincing. In doing that, I will explicate some important presuppositions that his arguments rest on. In view of this clarification, I will distinguish what I take to be three different dimensions of the realism debates. In addition to metaphysical realism, I will define semantic realism and epistemological realism.

In light of this demarcation, I will argue that one can be a semantic realist and an epistemological realist without having to be a metaphysical realist. Lastly, I will show that this possibility includes the conclusion that I aim for.

METAPHYSICAL REALISM

Putnam identifies metaphysical realism as a philosophical perspective comprising three central theses. His definition in *Reason, Truth and History* reads as follows:

> On this perspective [i.e. metaphysical realism], the world consists of some fixed totality of mind-independent objects. There is exactly one true and complete description of 'the way the world is'. Truth involves some sort of correspondence relation between words or thought-signs and external things and sets of things. I shall call this perspective the *externalist* perspective, because its favorite point of view is a God's Eye point of view.[1]

I will explain how I understand Putnam's characterization of metaphysical realism by adding a few clarifications to the citation. Firstly, the metaphysical realist argues that reality consists of some fixed totality of mind-independent objects. According to me, this fixed totality of mind-independent objects can be portrayed as a reality-in-itself, a reality that might be beyond human cognition. What is important to my argument is not that this totality is fixed. Instead, it is the mind-independence that is associated with this reality-in-itself that is essential. The metaphysical realist argues that there may be objects or states of affairs in reality-in-itself which human beings cannot experience or describe. William Alston, a philosopher whom I consider to be a metaphysical realist, illustrates what this implies. Alston writes:

> Isn't it highly likely that there are facts that will forever lie beyond us just because of [human] limitations? [...] The cognitive design of human beings represents only one of a large multitude of possible designs for cognitive subjects. [...] Given all this, shouldn't we take seriously the possibility that even if there is something wrong with the idea of facts that are in principle inaccessible to any cognitive subjects (and I don't see any fatal flaw in this idea), it could still be that there are many facts

[1] Putnam 1981: 49.

> accessible to cognizers with radically different hardware and software but totally inaccessible to us.[2]

In this passage, Alston opens up two possibilities. Firstly, he assumes that there can be states of affairs in reality that no cognitive subject has access to. Secondly, he claims that there may be states of affairs that only some kind of non-human cognizers have access to. What is common to both of these notions is the assumption that there may be states of affairs in reality that are completely inaccessible to human beings. This is the essence of the metaphysical realist's understanding of mind-independent reality.

Secondly, the metaphysical realist assumes that there is only one true and complete description of reality-in-itself. She needs not hold that we have access to this one true description; the fact that her 'God's-Eye point of view' is an externalist perspective in relation to us humans and to our abilities may well imply that it is impossible for us humans to formulate the one true and complete description of reality. However, this one true and complete description of reality can nevertheless exist, and it can consist of, for example, all true propositions or every claim that an omniscient God, if such a God exists, would be able to verify.

Thirdly, the metaphysical realist would argue that we speak the truth insofar as our utterances correspond to states of affairs of this independent reality. Different metaphysical realists describe this correspondence in different ways but what they all agree on is that it is entirely possible that we do not know, and cannot know, that a true statement is in fact true. We may not have any verification methods with the help of which we can find out if the utterance in question is true or false and we may never be able to access such methods. It may be that it is in principle impossible for us to know any such truths, but the utterance in question can nevertheless be true as long as it corresponds to the states of affairs of independent reality.

Putnam states that the most important consequence of metaphysical realism is that truth is supposed to be radically non-epistemic.[3] The metaphysical realist would argue that what is true is independent of our abilities to find out whether it is true. What is true is independent of our practice of seeking knowledge and of our criteria for when something can be said to be true. This implies that it is entirely possible that

[2] Alston 1997: 64-65.
[3] Putnam 1978: 125.

an utterance can meet the criteria for truth that we presuppose in our practice of seeking knowledge but that the utterance may nevertheless be false. What is true is not determined by us, from an internal perspective, but rather by reality-in-itself, from an external perspective. Putnam's arguments against metaphysical realism concern this externalism. In short, Putnam argues that it doesn't make sense.

THE UNTENABILITY OF METAPHYSICAL REALISM

Putnam repudiates metaphysical realism by composing several different arguments against it. I will concentrate on two objections that are common to some of them. The first line of reasoning emphasizes that we cannot refer to a reality-in-itself that is beyond human cognition. Therefore, we cannot state that such a reality exists. The second line of reasoning maintains that if metaphysical realism is correct, then we would not be able to communicate with each other. However, we are able to communicate with each other, we do it every day. Therefore, metaphysical realism cannot be an accurate perspective.

I will explicate these two lines of reasoning in connection to Putnam's most amusing example, namely his brains in a vat scenario.[4] In elaborating the first line of reasoning, Putnam argues that the metaphysical realist's thesis that we might be brains in a vat, although we are unable to discover that this is the case, is self-contradictory. It is a thesis which, if true, implies its own falsity. The reason is that we cannot refer to the metaphysical possibility that we are brains in a vat. Although such brains can think the words 'We are brains in a vat', they cannot, Putnam maintains, refer to the same things that we refer to when we use the concepts 'brain' and 'vat' (supposing that we are not brains in a vat). For this reason, they can neither think nor say that they are brains in a vat (in independent reality) even if they think or say the words 'We are brains in a vat'. The brain in a vat that thinks or says 'I am a brain in a vat' is wrong in the same sense that a person who says 'I am dreaming' is wrong when she (in the dream) is not dreaming that she is dreaming.[5]

This line of reasoning rests on the presupposition that the brain's words cannot, in some mysterious way, hook onto a reality-in-itself that is completely beyond the reality that the brain experiences. According

[4] Putnam 1981: 5-6.

[5] Johannesson 2007: 60-63.

to Putnam, we can never refer to such a reality-in-itself since we must interact with that which we are talking about if we are to be able to say that our words refer to that which we are talking about. Consequently, we can never correctly state that the reality-in-itself that the metaphysical realist identifies exists.[6]

The decisive element in the second line of reasoning can best be explained in relation to the metaphysical realist's assumption that a theory that we deem to be ideal in fact might be false.[7] An ideal theory is a theory that under perfect circumstances for justification meets all the operational and theoretical constraints that we can think of. The metaphysical realist holds that such a theory could be wrong. For example, the theory that we are not brains in a vat can be false even if there are no circumstances under which we can discover that this is the case.

Putnam argues that the metaphysical realist's assumption that even a theory that we consider to be ideal might be false jeopardizes human communication. The reason is that we would not be able to learn what it implies that something is true if truth and idealized justification were separated from each other in the manner that the metaphysical realist presupposes. Since truth-claims are crucial to our interpretation of each other's utterances, as Quine and Davidson point out, we have to grasp what it entails that something is true in order to learn and master a language. Since we humans do understand each other, at least now and then, the metaphysical realist's differentiation between truth and our criteria for rational acceptability has to be erroneous. If truth and idealized justification were disunited, language learning and communication would be impossible.[8]

According to Putnam and the internal realism that he suggests, we can only learn to talk about truth and tell the truth if our discourse on truth is related to our conceptions of sufficiently good conditions for justification. We may disagree on what constitutes sufficiently good conditions for the justification of a certain statement. Such variations do not jeopardize human communication. As long as every truth-claim is associated with some notion about what would constitute sufficiently good conditions for its justification we can understand what it implies that it is true. By identifying the situations in which a certain speaker or a certain group

[6] Johannesson 2007: 63-64.
[7] Johannesson 2007: 78-80.
[8] Johannesson 2007: 99.

of speakers, i.e. a particular linguistic community, is willing to make a particular statement, we are able to interpret its meaning.[9]

Putnam's argumentation reveals a certain entanglement of idealized rational acceptability, truth and correct linguistic behaviour that is essential to my argument. According to Putnam's internal realism, our ideas about correct linguistic behaviour reveal what we take to be sufficiently good conditions for justification and, consequently, they are the key to our understanding of truth. To say that something is true is to say that in a situation where sufficiently good conditions for justification are realized, we would consider a speaker in that situation to be justified in making the statement in question. In other words, the statement would be a manifestation of correct linguistic behaviour.

The entanglement of idealized rational acceptability, truth and correct linguistic behaviour implies that what constitutes sufficiently good conditions for justification can be discerned in our ideas about correct linguistic behaviour. The situations in which we consider ourselves to be entitled to make a certain statement are what clarify both our ideas about sufficiently good conditions for justifying that particular statement and what it implies that the statement is true. Thus, truth emerges as closely related to our conceptual resources insofar as it is linked to the correct usage of the conceptual resources that we have access to.

This linkage between our conceptual resources and truth is vital to my reasoning. The combination of semantic and epistemological realism that I recommend is a certain exposition of it. I will account for this combination in light of a particular demarcation between different kinds of realism.

REALISM IN THREE DIFFERENT DIMENSIONS

I will assume that there are three different dimensions to the concept of 'realism'. Since I understand 'anti-realism' as a term denoting the rejection of some kind of realism, I will correspondingly postulate that there are three different dimensions to the concept of 'anti-realism' as well.

The first dimension consists of the debate between metaphysical realists and metaphysical anti-realists. I recognize metaphysical anti-realism as an explicit rejection of metaphysical realism and its three

[9] Johannesson 2007: 148-150.

theses. Therefore, metaphysical anti-realism presupposes metaphysical realism in a certain sense. If metaphysical realism is unintelligible to us, then we cannot possibly understand the metaphysical anti-realist's denial of metaphysical realism either. Consequently, any criticism of metaphysical realism affects metaphysical anti-realism, as well.

The second dimension is epistemological and it concerns the existence of evidence-transcendent truths, i.e. truths that we humans cannot verify. An epistemological realist is of the opinion that there may be such truths. An epistemological anti-realist denies this.

The third dimension is semantic. My portrayal of it is closely related to Michael Dummett's work. Like Dummett, I take it that the realism debate, in its semantic form, is about which utterances we are entitled to conceive of as statements, that is, as sentences that are either true or false. If one is a semantic realist regarding a certain expression or group of utterances, then one claims that this expression or this group of utterances are statements, i.e. we are entitled to assume the principle of bivalence for this sentence or class of sentences. If one is an anti-realist one maintains that the saying or sayings in question cannot be properly understood as truth-claims. We are not entitled to assume that they are either true or false.[10]

My aim when I distinguish these three dimensions to the concepts of 'realism' and 'anti-realism' respectively is to argue that one can be a realist in one of these dimensions without having to adopt a realist position in all three dimension. Metaphysical realism is, arguably, a philosophical perspective that entails a comprehensive epistemological realism and a wide-ranging semantic realism. The metaphysical realist maintains that a certain claim about reality can be correctly understood as a statement even if we cannot imagine any situation in which conditions for its justification would be sufficiently good for us to be able determine its truth-value. Thus, she maintains that a particular statement can be true even if we do not know of any situation in which it would be correct to use it. This is an extensive semantic realism. Furthermore, she assumes that there might be truths that we cannot verify because they concern states of affairs that are beyond human cognition. This, in turn, is a comprehensive epistemological realism.

My main point is that not only the metaphysical realist but also the non-metaphysical realist can approve of a quite far-reaching semantic

[10] Johannesson 2007: 176-177. Cf. Dummett 1993: 230.

realism as well as an epistemological realist position without falling prey to Putnam's criticism. I will describe this possibility by adopting the following strategy: I will take Dummett's characterization of the disagreement between semantic realists and semantic anti-realists as my point of departure. Then I will argue that we, in light of Putnam's internal realism, are entitled to be semantic realists in more cases than Dummett allows for. After that I will return to Dummett's work and show that we can achieve a corresponding expansion of epistemological realism using Putnam's internal realism.

SEMANTIC REALISM

The question Dummett seeks to answer is the following: Under what circumstances are we entitled to assume the principle of bivalence for some class of statements? Dummett examines two alternative answers to this question. The first one is the idea that we are entitled to assume the principle of bivalence for a given class of statements, independently of whether or not we know the truth-value of every statement in the class. The other alternative answer examined is the idea that we are only entitled to assume the principle of bivalence in cases where we are able to determine whether each individual statement in the given class is true or false.[11]

Dummett argues in favour of the second alternative. Accordingly, he is of the opinion that we are only entitled to assume the principle of bivalence for effectively decidable statements, i.e. utterances whose truth-value we can decide. What makes Dummett draw this conclusion is the assumption that we only know for sure that a certain class of sentences are either true or false when we are able to determine their truth-value. Like Putnam, Dummett claims that if language learning is to be at all possible, then our practice when it comes to making truth-claims and talking about what is true must relate issues about what is true to our knowledge about which statements we can verify or falsify and to the methods of verification and falsification that are available to us. However, unlike Putnam, Dummett assumes that our actual practice of verifying or falsifying statements limits our possibilities to justly claim that a certain utterance is either true or false. [12]

[11] Johannesson 2007: 178; Dummett 1978: xix, xxxi, 146.

[12] Johannesson 2007: 148, 180. Cf. Putnam 1983: 84.

According to Putnam, righteousness goes beyond justification in a sense that Dummett finds unintelligible. Putnam's and Dummett's diverging opinions concerning the relationship between truth and justification has to do with their different judgments regarding what is required for us to be able to learn a language and understand each other.

To me, it seems to be the case that if we are to be able to recognize and understand truth-claims, a capacity that is decisive for our ability to learn and master a language, we can only correctly assume that utterances that are associated with some notion of sufficiently good conditions for justification are statements.[13] For this reason, I agree to a certain interpretation of Putnam's position. I assume that for every utterance that we can accurately conceptualize as a statement, we can imagine a situation in which some speaker would consider herself to be justified in uttering the sentence in question. In such cases, we can understand what it implies for the utterance to be true. If we are unable to imagine any situation in which a speaker might want to utter a particular statement, we are not entitled to assume that that sentence is a statement.

The position that I advocate implies a certain enlargement of the scope of semantic realism. Inspired by Putnam, I argue that we are entitled to assume the principle of bivalence in further cases than Dummett admits. Most importantly, I believe that our incapacity to provide what we consider to be sufficiently good conditions for justification of a certain statement does not always entail the conclusion that the statement in question is not, properly speaking, a statement. Even if we cannot provide what we consider to be sufficiently good conditions for the justification of a certain statement we are entitled to assume that the statement is a statement as long as we can imagine some situation in which it would be correct to make the statement in question. Consequently, it is only our capacity to imagine what constitutes a correct linguistic behaviour, i.e. a correct use of a certain statement, which sets the boundaries for semantic realism.[14]

EVIDENCE-TRANSCENDENT TRUTHS

Semantic realism is linked to epistemological realism in such a way that one can only be an epistemological realist in relation to sentences that

[13] Cf. Johannesson 2007: 200-201.
[14] Johannesson 2007: 200, 204.

can be conceived of in a semantic realist way. Against the background of my assumption that we are entitled to assume the principle of bivalence for utterances that are associated with a discernible idea of sufficiently good conditions for justification, I will explicate the kind of evidence-transcendent truths that I think we can allow for. In addition, I will identify two kinds of evidence-transcendent truths that metaphysical realists such as Alston might find comprehensible but which I find unintelligible.

Once again my point of departure will be Dummett's more limited acceptance of semantic realism. Dummett's position seems to exclude the existence of evidence-transcendent truths. However, I believe that even Dummett's position leaves a certain room for such truths.[15] In light of the more wide-ranging semantic realism that I advocate, this space can be extended. I will describe what this expansion implies in relation to two categories of evidence-transcendent truths that I think Dummett and like-minded philosophers have to reckon with.

Firstly, Dummett assumes that a particular statement is either verifiable or not. However, verification does not always come fully at once. A lot of the statements that we make are, for the moment, only partly verifiable. Such statements can be thought of as evidence-transcendent truths.[16] The non-metaphysical realist would definitely agree to this possibility since inconclusively verified truths are associated with an idea of what would constitute sufficiently good conditions for their final justification. Dummett, in turn, could assume that there are evidence-transcendent truths of this kind if he was of the opinion that we are entitled to assume the principle of bivalence for sentences that are verifiable, but not yet conclusively verified or falsified.

Secondly, Dummett holds that we are entitled to assume the principle of bivalence for sentences that we can verify or falsify in a finite time. If he allows this time period to be a relatively long one, then he can be of the opinion that we are entitled to assume the principle of bivalence for sentences that we can verify or falsify in principle, though perhaps not in practice.[17] This is the position that I support.

Like Dummett, I assume that it is absurd to hold that a sentence can be true even though there is nothing whatever such that, if we knew of it,

[15] Johannesson 2007: 192-193.
[16] Johannesson 2007: 192.
[17] Johannesson 2007: 192-193.

we should count it as evidence or ground for the truth of the statement.[18] This is the essence of the assumption that every statement has to be associated with some idea concerning what constitutes sufficiently good conditions for its justification. However, unlike Dummett I believe that we do not have to be in possession of so much evidence that we can verify a certain statement in order for us to be able to rightly conclude that it is a statement.

In fact, occasionally we can rightly argue that a certain statement has truth-conditions which are satisfied, or which are not satisfied, even if there is neither any evidence supporting the conclusion that the statement is true, nor any evidence supporting the conclusion that it is false. Admittedly, every statement cannot be of this kind. In that case, we would not be able to learn what it implies that something is true and, consequently, we would be unable to learn a language. However, once we master a language, we can sometimes justly claim that the principle of bivalence applies to a certain statement even if we haven't got a clue as to its truth-value.[19]

If one reasons as I do, there is a rather large space for evidence-transcendent truths. However, two kinds of evidence-transcendent truths that the metaphysical realist might want to reckon with are excluded. Firstly, my non-metaphysical realist perspective excludes the possibility that there might be truths for which we cannot envision sufficiently good conditions for justification. If we do not know when it would be correct for us to make a certain statement, we cannot meaningfully imagine what it implies that the statement in question is an evidence-transcendent truth.[20]

Secondly, we cannot meaningfully imagine the possibility that there might be evidence-transcendent truths that we cannot formulate, using our conceptual resources. Arguably, there are truths that I as an individual cannot express. However, we cannot comprehend the existence of truths which are altogether beyond human conceptualization.[21] The entanglement of truth, idealized justification and correct linguistic behaviour excludes this kind of evidence-transcendent truths. Nevertheless, I believe that we are entitled to conceptualize truth as in

[18] Dummett 1978: 15.
[19] Johannesson 2007: 193-194.
[20] Johannesson 2007: 162.
[21] Johannesson 2007: 161.

a certain sense independent of us and our language. Next, I will turn to the interdependence between semantic realism and ontological issues in order to explain how this is possible.

STATEMENTS ABOUT A SHARED INDEPENDENT REALITY

According to Dummett and Putnam, our approach to semantic realism affects not only our possibilities of assuming that there are evidence-transcendent truths, but also our view of the constitution of reality. This is because there is a correlation between true sentences and facts. The correlation entails that there can be no facts, no states of affairs in reality, which we are unable to express in statements, using our conceptual resources.

Admittedly, what this implies is that in a certain sense, that which exists independently of us and our language depends on us and our language. Our ability to imagine states of affairs in reality presupposes our concept formation and our practice of justifying statements. To some, for example to Alston, this might seem as an obvious rejection of the claim that many believe sets realism apart, namely the claim that reality is independent of us human beings and our outlook. Furthermore, since conceptual resources and ideas about what would constitute sufficiently good conditions for the justification of a certain statement vary across temporal and cultural boundaries, this dependence may appear to result in the conclusion that we can never justly claim that a certain statement is true for everyone, even for ancient people who did not speak the language by means of which the statement is expressed.

However, the fact that we need access to some set of conceptual resources in order to express a statement does not necessarily imply that a certain statement is true only for speakers of a particular language or that it would cease to be true if no speakers were to be found. That this conclusion doesn't follow depends on our possibility to conceptualize truths as objective and true to us all by universalizing our current conceptual scheme.

I will illustrate what such a generalization entails with the help of an example. We consider the statement 'The sky is blue' to be true. This means that, according to us, the sky would have been blue even if our conceptual resources had been radically different and we had had completely different concepts of colour. Furthermore, we believe that

the sky would have been blue even if there had been no human beings around to state that the sky is blue. In this regard, the colour of the sky is, according to us, independent of us.[22]

However, the fact that the sky is blue, and the statement that it is blue, cannot exist independently of us and our conceptual resources. Independently of us and our conceptual resources, the fact that the sky is blue cannot be discerned, and the statement that the sky is blue cannot be formulated. Thus, in a certain sense, it is we and the decisions we make when we develop our conceptual resources that determine what might be a fact.[23]

However, this does not imply that we cannot conceptualize statements as about a shared independent reality or justly claim that they, if they are true, are true for everyone; quite the opposite. By assuming a particular conception of what might constitute sufficiently good conditions for the justification of a certain statement, we can maintain that the statement in question is true (or false) not only for us but also for people who do not share our conceptual resources or our conception of what constitutes sufficiently good conditions for justification.

The core of this claim might be summarized as follows: When we make a statement we assume that what it implies for this statement to be true is that, if a speaker who masters our language and finds herself in a situation where sufficiently good conditions for justification are realized (i.e. sufficiently good conditions according to our standards) were to make the statement in question, she would be fully warranted in accepting that statement as true. In universalizing our current conceptual scheme, we are universalizing our conceptions of sufficiently good conditions for justification as well as our conceptual resources. By doing that, we are able to claim that a certain statement is true independently of us and to us all. Whether this claim is correct or not can subsequently be discussed, even among people who do not share the same conception of sufficiently good conditions for justification for this particular statement.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I will return to the two horns of the dilemma that is the upshot of my argument. On the one hand, I take it that we need access

[22] Putnam 1996: 302; Johannesson 2007: 146-147.
[23] Putnam 1996: 302; Johannesson 2007: 146-147.

to a philosophical perspective that suggests that assertions made in religious contexts can be conceptualized as statements about a shared independent reality, statements that might be true even if we are unable to justify them. On the other hand, I believe that we cannot make use of the metaphysical realist perspective since language-learning and human communication appear to be a complete mystery if our discourse on truth and our notions about sufficiently good conditions of justification and correct linguistic behaviour are isolated from each other.

The solution that I propose is a particular realist outlook. It consists in a certain combination of semantic realism and epistemological realism and it can be summarized as follows:

(1) We are entitled to assume that a certain utterance is a statement, i.e. that it is either true or false, if it is associated with a particular conception of what constitutes sufficiently good conditions for its justification, a conception that we can discern by identifying in what situation it would be appropriate to make the statement or conclude that it is false.
(2) We are entitled to conceptualize an unverified statement as an evidence-transcendent truth if we can imagine its justification and would recognize a situation in which it would be appropriate to make the statement.
(3) We are entitled to conceive of a particular truth-claim as being about an independent reality that is common to all of us in those cases where we can universalize a certain set of linguistic resources and a particular conception of sufficiently good conditions for its justification.

By adopting this kind of realism, i.e. non-metaphysical realism, I believe that we can conceptualize certain religious claims as statements and as an evidence-transcendent truth about an independent reality that we share with each other without being affected by Putnam's criticism of metaphysical realism. Furthermore, in light of this kind of realism the task to distinguish and critically discuss different opinions about what would constitute sufficiently good conditions for the justification of frequently occurring religious statements stands out as a major task for the philosopher of religion. In carrying out this kind of work, I think that the philosopher can contribute an analysis that can be useful also for theologians and religious people since it might, for example, help people to overcome religious doubts or facilitate the dialogue between different

religious traditions. This is a major advantage according to those of us who believe that philosophical work should be of relevance also to others than the ones conducting it.

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BETWEEN NATURALISM AND THEISM: JOHNSTON AND PUTNAM ON THE REALITY OF GOD

MAGNUS SCHLETTE

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Abstract. The essay compares Mark Johnston's and Hilary Putnam's approaches to the philosophy of religion in the framework of Charles Taylor's claim that in modernity 'intermediate positions' between theism and naturalism become increasingly attractive for a growing amount of people. Both authors show that intermediate positions between naturalism and theism are conceptually plausible without having to deny that the conflicting worldviews are about a mind-independent reality. Johnston bridges the gap between naturalism and theism by developing a panentheistic worldview, Putnam denies the necessity of bridging it by choosing an attitude toward the world that allows for the coexistence of at least partly incommensurable conceptualizations of what there is. In both cases the conceptual exploration of intermediate positions is fed by the authors' commitment to intellectual integrity in coming to terms with the tension between scientific explanation and religious interpretation in the age of applied sciences.

There is an obvious tension that has always qualified the relationship between natural explanation and religious interpretation of the world. The allegorical interpretation of authoritative religious scripture in the Jewish and Christian tradition, going back as far as Philo and Origines, has been at least partly motivated by this tension. Since the 1800s, in the wake of Darwinism, historicism and the rise of empirical psychology, this tension is no longer a purely academic affair. It has deeply influenced the practical dispositions of a still growing majority of people. Even more so, it is the ubiquity of applied science in an increasingly technology-laden lifeworld that fosters this tension nowadays. The engineering force of technology reaches into the structure of life. If its organic constituents

can be intentionally changed, it seems to be evident for many that they are also the essence of life. And the expanding scientific accessibility of the organic realm has consequences in habitus formation.

Two examples: *Firstly*, within the last 20 years the diagnosis of some sort of mental disorder has risen by over 30% in the Western world. The renowned psychiatrist Allen Frances has pointed out that the new Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, published in May 2013 (DSM-5) will cause a diagnostic inflation in psychiatry by reducing thresholds for existing disorders and introducing new disorders at the fuzzy boundaries to normality.[1] *Secondly*, there is a growing market for braincare practices that promise to delay aging and prolong mental fitness. The prudential good of old age has been reformulated as a proper organic state that is under scientific control. In both cases, scientific explanation takes precedence over a change in the way of seeing one's own life. Comprehensive interpretations of life as they have been offered by religions seem to be dispensable in the light of a growing control over nature.

I suggest that under contemporary conditions in the West we should focus the tension between natural explanation and religious interpretation as 'cross-pressures' – to use Charles Taylor's term – between naturalism and theism. 'The great invention of the West', according to Taylor, is the establishment of 'an immanent order in Nature, whose working could be systematically understood and explained on its own terms, leaving open the question whether this whole order had a deeper significance, and whether, if it did, we should infer a transcendent Creator beyond it. This notion of the "immanent" involved denying – or at least isolating and problematizing – any form of interpenetration between the things of Nature, on the one hand, and the "supernatural" on the other.'[2] Leaving open the question whether we should infer a transcendent Creator beyond the immanent order in Nature is, again, no academic question, but depends on the potential of the immanent order to do the whole job. The immanent order allows us to build hospitals, but does it get rid of sickness? It delivers the tools of prolonging one's life, but does it defeat mortality? It may increase material wealth, but does it secure happiness?

[1] Allen Frances, *Saving Normal: An Insider's Revolt against Out-of-Control Psychiatric Diagnosis, DSM-5, Big Pharma, and the Medicalization of Ordinary Life* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2013).

[2] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Havard Univ. Press, 2007), p. 16.

Taylor senses cross pressures in our culture 'between the draw of the narratives of closed immanence on the one hand, and the sense of their inadequacy on the other'[3] – the latter has obviously to do with the fact that the answers to the foregoing questions are negative. The Western population is torn between an anti-religious and particularly anti-Christian sentiment that is based on the expanding knowledge gathered in the sciences and humanities on the one hand and an aversion toward some extreme form of reduction initiated by this very knowledge on the other. This reduction takes the 'nothing but' form: Sickness is nothing but a problem of proper medication; mortality will be rendered irrelevant by significantly extending our lifespan; consent on the vague topic of happiness can only be found in terms of the accessibility to material wealth.

But even those who sense the inadequacy of the immanent order are confronted with the cognitive problem of interrelating the immanent and the transcendent. Taylor's diagnosis is that late modernity unfolds a broad spectrum of 'intermediate positions' between naturalism and theism that tries to go beyond the 'nothing but'-stance toward the world, but at the same time does not fail to acknowledge that the immanent order is potentially coherent on its own terms. Therefore the intermediate positions don't go for any 'God of the gaps' like, for example, in certain theological interpretations of quantum mechanics. Obviously, the attempt of interrelating the immanent and the transcendent on these premises boils down to how we can conceptualize what is supposed to be real. The tension between naturalism and theism has an intrinsic drive to articulate itself within the dichotomy of realism vs. anti-realism. This dichotomy should be considered as indicating the striving for intellectual integrity in dealing with the cross pressures between naturalism and theism. In the following I will present two intermediate positions that both explicitly refer to intellectual integrity or honesty as the driving force of coming to terms with the aforesaid cross pressures in modern life. And both positions take, as I would say, intermediate positions between straightforward realism and anti-realism. These positions have been recently and prominently articulated by Mark Johnston in his contribution to philosophical theology under the title *Saving God* from 2009 and by Hilary Putnam in his reflections on the philosophy of religion since *Renewing Philosophy* and especially in *Jewish Philosophy*

3 Ibid., p. 595.

as a Guide to Life, published in 2008. Before I suggest how Johnston and Putnam are to be located between realism and anti-realism, I intend to give a rough definition of the key terms I will be using.

The 'quest for reality' has a metaphysical and an epistemological side to it. I suggest calling metaphysically real that which is independent of what we think about it, and epistemically real what humans get to know in itself, in its mind-independent reality.[4] Accordingly, metaphysical anti-realism supposes that we cannot think of anything real as independent of our mind, whereas epistemic anti-realism rejects the possibility of knowing things in themselves. Various positions may be differentiated according to the relation of the metaphysical and the epistemic claim. It is possible to claim independence plus accessibility of certain entities, but also to combine the independence claim with the denial of accessibility to the supposedly independent. Whereas epistemic antirealism seems to follow necessarily from metaphysical antirealism, metaphysical realism does not force us to take the position of epistemic realism. We may think of a completely mind-independent world without expecting that we will ever come to a complete or even nearly complete conceptual account of this world. Let us see now, how naturalism and theism fit into the picture of the major dichotomy.

If we follow Arthur C. Danto's definition in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, naturalism 'is a species of philosophical monism according to which whatever exists or happens is *natural* in the sense of being susceptible to explanation through methods, which, although paradigmatically exemplified in the natural sciences, are continuous from domain to domain of objects and events. Hence, naturalism is polemically defined as repudiating the view that there exists or could exist any entities or events which lie, in principle, beyond the scope of scientific explanation'.[5] I would rather refer to this position as *scientism*. It combines metaphysical realism with epistemic realism on the basis of scientific explanation. Other versions of naturalism would accordingly take science to deliver pragmatically successful explanations of the natural realm, explanations that might nonetheless radically change in the wake of scientific revolutions and their cultural embeddings.

[4] I follow Merold Westphal with this differentiation. Cf. Merold Westphal, 'Theological Anti-Realism', in Andrew Moore & Michael Scott (eds.), *Realism and Religion. Philosophical and Theological Perspectives* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p. 132.

[5] Arthur C. Danto, 'Naturalism', in: *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan Publishers,1967).

These versions would combine epistemic anti-realism either with metaphysical realism or metaphysical anti-realism. In the first case they would take the conceptual account of the natural realm as an ongoing process of approximation to theoretical coherence and consistency, which nevertheless might fail to grasp what the world is in itself. In the second case they would take the conceptualizations of the world as being somehow constitutive of what they intend to grasp.

How about theism? A metaphysically realist version of theism would contend that God has a mind-independent reality. Epistemic realism would additionally claim that this reality is subject to human knowledge, whether via reason or revelation. It is obvious that this position is at loggerheads with religious pluralism, since there can be only one veridical access to the mind-independent reality of God and accordingly the other ones must be false – unless they are taken to be different versions of the supposedly right access which can be correctly reformulated in the appropriate vocabulary. Metaphysically anti-realist conceptions of God take whatever his name refers to as being dependent on the cognitive faculties, desires and dispositions of man. One way to be metaphysically anti-realist about God would be to call him an imaginative construct.[6] The supposed construct, again, calls for functional explanation. This position is compatible with a religion-critical as well as religion-affirmative stance. Justin Barrett, for example, a cognitive scientist at Oxford, claims that humans are 'naturally endowed with cognitive faculties that stimulate belief in the divine',[7] including a hyperactive agent detection device. Whereas for Richard Dawkins this research feeds into his Darwinian account of religious belief that he takes to undermine its epistemic value, Barrett himself accepts it as evidence that can justify religious claims.[8] Metaphysical realism about naturalism can very well coexist with metaphysical antirealism about theism, both, for unbelievers or even atheists as well as for believers.

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[6] Cf. Gordon D. Kaufman, 'Mystery, God, and Constructivism', in Andrew Moore & Michael Scott, op. cit., p. 16.

[7] Kelly James Clark and Justin L. Barrett, 'Reidian Religious Epistemology and the Cognitive Science of Religion', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 79 (2011), pp. 639 – 675.

[8] The indication of this debate I owe to Wayne Proudfoot's 'Pragmatism and Naturalism in the Study of Religion', in Hermann Deuser, Hans Joas, Matthias Jung, Magnus Schlette (eds.), *The Varieties of Transcendence: Pragmatism and the Theory of Religion* (New York: Fordham Univ. Press, forthcoming).

If we want to understand the cross pressures in our culture between realism and anti-realism about the worldviews of naturalism and theism we must understand how they contribute to the best account of our self-understanding. Consequently they must be viewed from the first-person perspective. What speaks for realism in religious matters from the first-person-perspective is the fact that certain experiences we call religious are experiences about God, his action, presence and so forth. Even if those experiences might not be specific enough for a warrant of apprehension, believers are certain that they have encountered God and not, for example, his imaginative construct, which, by the way, cannot be the subject of an encounter for grammatical reasons: Nothing we just imagine can surprise or irritate us, and an encounter always bears the potential of an irritation or surprise. What that means in religious matters we may learn from the phenomenological precision of scholars in religious studies such as William James or Rudolf Otto. On the other hand, what speaks for anti-realism in religious matters is the fact that a realist interpretation of religious experience contradicts the suggestive force of our third-person-knowledge. Let me give you an example:[9] the Swiss ethno-psychoanalyst Paul Parin once travelled to a Melanesian tribe and got to talk to members of this tribe. At some point he asked a young man how he contracted the suppuration of his right big toe. The man answered that his mother in law had bewitched him. A little later Parin noticed that the man's left big toe did not look much better. The man informed him that he got an infection there. Noticing that Parin was puzzled about his answer the man asked, whether he, Parin, did not know what an infection is. I bet we would have been puzzled too. We tend to think that whenever the story of infection is available to appropriately clarify a particular matter like a swollen foot, the story of witchcraft has lost its validity. There seems to be an expansive force in the naturalist worldview which invites the belief that, in the long run, it will be applicable to fields which so far have not been affected by it. Whenever a particular matter comes into the spotlight of the infection paradigm, it seems to force some sort of inferential scorekeeping on us that does not allow for the witchcraft paradigm anymore. What speaks for realism about naturalism, therefore, is the eminent success of science

[9] I owe this example to Hans Julius Schneider, 'Spirituelle Praxis, religiöse Rede und intellektuelle Redlichkeit', in Gerald Hartung & Magnus Schlette (eds.), *Religiosität und intellektuelle Redlichkeit* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012).

in establishing an order we may live by, an order with an enormous potential to manipulate and predict states and events. What speaks for an anti-realist stance about naturalism is the realm of experiences that science cannot account for, yet, unless it agrees to some form of descriptive reductionism.

As I already mentioned, a position mediating between realism and anti-realism could uphold that what there is, is independent of our minds, whereas our cognition of it does not just mirror it in itself but is contentually dependent on our conceptual activity. I now want to suggest that Mark Johnston – in *Saving God* from 2009 – and Hilary Putnam – in his later works on the philosophy of religion up to *Jewish Philosophy as a Guide to Life* from 2008 – offer two versions of how to take such an intermediate position in dealing with the tension between naturalism and theism. I will give a sketch of how they both digest the cross pressures of naturalism and theism, and then shortly comment on how their positions fit into the picture of the realism debate.

Let's start with Johnston's praise of naturalism. He understands 'legitimate naturalism' as 'proper respect for the methods and achievements of science',[10] which means that theism receives its epistemic value from its coherence with the verification-related knowledge that has been acquired in the sciences. The achievements of science are treated as a benchmark for the credibility of religious convictions. On the other hand, Johnston defends these against scientism, proposed by 'undergraduate atheists' – as Johnston stresses the supposed simplicity of their worldview – according to which science 'will provide an exhaustive inventory of what there is'.[11] Johnston illustrates his route between a concept of theism that is indifferent to the achievements of science and a reductionist account of theism fuelled by scientism with a simple example: 'No one should think that an ordinary description of the neighbor's wedding and a mathematical description of the trajectories of the fundamental particles involved in the events of the wedding are descriptions of the very same activity, namely, the wedding. The physical events subsumed under the basic physical laws are thus better seen as the *ultimate material constituents* of the activities, achievements, and accomplishments whose forms physics has no business rehearsing.'[12]

[10] Mark Johnston, *Saving God* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), p. 43.
[11] Ibid., p. 47.
[12] Ibid., p. 49.

Accordingly Johnston suggests reflecting on the meaning of what there is according to theism in the light of the premise that it must consist of ultimate material constituents, which may be identified by science. 'Legitimate naturalism is not the thesis that only the natural realm exists. That is the thesis of scientism. Legitimate naturalism is the view that the domain of the natural sciences is complete on its own terms: every causal transaction ultimately consists of some utterly natural process, for example, mass-energy transfer. There are no gods of the gaps.'[13]

The first step of this approach is the rigid refusal of supernatural elements and interpretations in the Christian tradition, which Johnston almost exclusively focuses on in his treatment of theism. Consequently, he understands 'God' not as a proper name, which according to his Kripke-style argumentation would have to be connected 'with a chain of reference that leads back to an original use of the name in question, a use in which the name was given to its bearer'.[14] The logic of his argumentation requires understanding 'god' as a descriptive name, since '[t]here is no original dubbing of someone or something as "God"'.[15] Whereas proper names have a rigid reference, but flexible meaning, descriptive names to the contrary combine a flexible reference with rigid meanings: 'the reference of such names is just that of their semantically associated descriptions.'[16] In accordance with the monotheistic tradition he then specifies the content of this name as the 'Highest One from whom our salvation flows. For that is the common conception of God in the major monotheisms'.[17] Beware, now, that according to Johnston, the matrix of what there is consists of its ultimate material constituents. Hence his concept of God's existence, of his power and impact on the earthly matters has to match this naturalist premise, too. Johnston's solution that leans against an interpretation of the *tetragrammaton*, including a critical debate of traditional philosophical theology on this matter, is the conceptualization of god as 'the outpouring of Existence Itself by way of its exemplification in ordinary existents'.[18]

Johnston then connects this ontological concept of God with an epistemological concept of religious experience as a form of direct

[13] Ibid., p. 127.
[14] Ibid., p. 5.
[15] Ibid., p. 6.
[16] Ibid., p. 7.
[17] Ibid., p. 13.
[18] Ibid., p. 113.

realism that allows access to the self-disclosure of the Highest One in ordinary existents on condition of a revised way of seeing as well as a fundamentally changed attitude toward life. Here Johnston clearly borrows from Wittgenstein's lectures on ethics: 'In the experience of feeling absolutely safe, everything in one's sensory field is presented as a manifestation of something that remains the same despite its various transformations into things that come into being and pass away. Moreover, on the side of introspection or inner perception, one is given to oneself as just another such manifestation, one whose passing away will leave intact everything that is fundamentally precious. It is, if you like, an experience of ordinary existents as dependent aspects of something else, as modes or modifications of that something else, which itself always remains.'[19] The point is that epistemology and ontology are intrinsically related: the self-disclosure of the Highest One ontologically encompasses its cognition, the cognition of the Highest One finds itself as being epistemically dependent on the self-disclosure of the Highest One. Johnston calls this 'presentationalism' in explicit opposition to the dogma of representationalism.[20]

But the accessibility of the Highest One calls for the virtue of self-decentration, which Johnston takes to be at the core of the Gospel and the essence of grace and redemption. The large-scale defects of human life, personal suffering and individual striving for the sunny side of the street that intends to circumvent or at least buffer existential contingencies, are rendered irrelevant, the worldliness of self-love and righteousness are overcome. The believer devotes himself to the Highest One who provides salvation by disclosing himself in this very devotion that provides cognitive access to it. Johnston calls it *agape*, and Jesus Christ becomes his key symbol for this virtue: 'Christ conquers death on our behalf by ideally exemplifying agape, and stimulating it in us.'[21] The image of Jesus Christ that Johnston evokes in *Saving God* is similar to Nietzsche's intimate portrait of Jesus as the 'Berg-, See – und Wiesen-Prediger, dessen Erscheinung wie ein Buddha auf einem sehr wenig indischen Boden anmutet'.[22] Johnston presents Jesus as the antetype of a panentheistic spirituality that enlivens the best of Christian theism.

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[19] Ibid., p. 111.

[20] Cf. ibid., p. 143.

[21] Ibid., p. 186.

[22] Friedrich Nietzsche, *'Antichrist', Götzendämmerung* (Stuttgart: Kröner,1990), p. 227.

Let's turn to Putnam, who embraces naturalism not less than Johnston does. In the autobiographical introduction to his *Jewish Philosophy as a Guide to Life* from 2008, he described his standpoint between naturalism and theism as 'somewhere between John Dewey in *A Common Faith* and Martin Buber'.[23] Dewey stands for a religiously open naturalism that has also been referred to as religious naturalism.[24] Dewey insistently defended and actually personally demonstrated that it is possible to integrate strong naturalist convictions and a deeply religious attitude toward the world. Dewey acknowledges what Taylor now calls the experience of fullness at the heart of authentic religiousness. He stresses that nobody need fear that she lose access to this deeper dimension of life if she revokes her commitment to the supernaturalist contents of traditional religion. And he also says that nobody seeking this deeper dimension of life is necessarily forced into supernaturalist convictions. Dewey accounts for this promise by centring religiousness in religious experience and by conceptualizing religious experience in a merely formal way, according to which '"religious" as a quality of experience signifies something that may belong to all [...] experiences'[25] – whether they are aesthetic, scientific, moral or political. He wants to mobilize religious experience as an innerworldy force that may be present in all we do and that may shape our accomplishments.[26] It is the force of 'being conquered, vanquished, in our active nature by an ideal end; it signifies acknowledgement of its rightful claim over our desires and purposes'[27] that unifies the self and evokes a feeling of harmony with the universe.[28] Dewey calls faith the unification of the self 'through allegiance to inclusive ideal ends, which imagination presents to us and to which the human will respond as worthy of controlling our desires and choices'.[29] Please note that the intentional object of faith is an ideal that *as such* has neither a mere subjective reality 'in mind' nor a substantive reality within some remote ontological sphere, but an *operative* reality 'in character, in personality and action'.[30]

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[23] Hilary Putnam, *Jewish Philosophy as a Guide to Life* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), p. 5.

[24] Cf. J. A. Stone, *Religious Naturalism Today. The Rebirth of a Forgotten Alternative* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007).

[25] John Dewey, *A Common Faith* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1934), p. 10.

[26] Ibid., p. 14.

[27] Ibid., p. 20.

[28] Ibid., pp. 22f.

[29] Ibid., p. 33.

Supernaturalist beliefs do not fit into this picture. They are wrong, since naturalism has an astonishing career of verification behind it and in front of it, which steadily diminishes the sphere of supernaturalist propositions held to be true.[31] Besides that, supernaturalist beliefs 'weaken and sap the force of the possibilities'[32] inherent in the common and natural relations of mankind. Now, Dewey does not only rebuff supernaturalism, he also identifies the traditional institutionalized religions with supernaturalism. Again, he does not plea for giving up the idea of 'God' but for avoiding 'misleading conceptions' of what this idea 'really' refers to: 'For there are forces in nature and society that generate and support the ideals. They are further unified by the action that gives them coherence and solidity. It is this active relationship between ideal and actual to which I would give the name "God".'[33]

Putnam proceeds on his way to reconcile the naturalist and the theistic outlook by *accepting* Dewey's general naturalist and religious premises, but *declining* the conclusions he draws from them: Supernaturalism is wrong, 'the kind of reality God has is the reality of an ideal',[34] an ideal as objective as it can be in that it calls forth deeds of great courage and dedication. On the other hand, God is not *just* an ideal like any other. 'The traditional believer', says Putnam, '– and this is something I share with the traditional believer [...] – visualizes God as a supremely wise, kind, just person.'[35] Indeed, this believer may ask whether Dewey defends a rather distortingly deflated concept of religious experience which leaves out what is essential to it, namely that it is intrinsically related to a supremely wise, kind, just person as its internal object.[36] The argument is not that *any* religious experience worthy of its name has to be the experience of a personal God. The argument is that *particular* religious experiences cannot be reformulated in non-theistic terms without avoiding – in Wayne Proudfoot's terms – descriptive reductionism.[37] Accordingly,

[30] Ibid., p. 48.
[31] Ibid., p. 30.
[32] Ibid., p. 27.
[33] Ibid., p. 51.
[34] Ibid., p. 101.
[35] Ibid., p. 102.
[36] For this argument cf. Richard Bernstein, 'Pragmatism's Common Faith', in Stuart Rosenbaum (ed.), *Pragmatism and Religion* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003), p. 135.
[37] Cf. Wayne Proudfoot, *Religious Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Pr., 1985).

Putnam also refutes Dewey's suggestion that by defending theism you feed into the pockets of supernaturalism. For Putnam, naturalist theism is possible. You may decline supernaturalism and still deeply believe in God as a person who is supremely wise and, above all, kind and just *to you*. How can that be?

I think that Putnam wants to reconcile Dewey-style religious naturalism with theism by turning to the philosophy of Wittgenstein. For Putnam, Wittgenstein's laconic linguistic observations on the religious use of language hint to how a reconciliation of naturalism and theism might be possible, a reconciliation that takes both to be cognitively valid outlooks on the world. Let me concentrate on five brief points in his interpretation of Wittgenstein:

(1) The meaning of a linguistic expression depends on the inferential commitments we have when using this expression. This becomes clear if we take a look at the analogy Wittgenstein draws between an algorithm on the one hand and the inferential commitments we enter into by using the vocabulary of our language on the other. If somebody said that 2 plus 21 was 13, it would be inappropriate to accuse him of making a mistake; the difference to *our* way of adding numbers would be just too big. This brings us to the next point:

(2) There are different semantic frameworks that qualify what we are inferentially committed to, when we use the vocabulary of our ordinary language. Wittgenstein makes it clear 'that religious people do employ pictures, and that they draw certain consequences from them, but not the same consequences that we draw when we use similar pictures in other contexts. If I speak of my friend as having an eye, then normally I am prepared to say that he has an eyebrow, but when I speak of the Eye of God being upon me, I am not prepared to speak of the eyebrow of God'.[38] But it may be objected that these different contexts of use simply hint to the difference between literal and metaphorical meaning, which brings us to the third point:

(3) The semantic frameworks in question cannot be reduced to each other. In consequence this means that the differentiation between literal and metaphorical meaning can only be appropriately drawn from a standpoint *within* each framework. And whether something can be said in a non-pictorial manner can only be decided inside the semantic

[38] Hilary Putnam, *Renewing Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 156.

framework in question. Here Putnam agrees with Wittgenstein, who says there may be pictures 'at the root of all our thinking',[39] which must therefore be respected. Criteria for applying a picture, which are external to the semantic framework in which the picture is used, including criteria to translate a picture into a certain literal meaning, may entirely distort what the speaker intended to say. They may force inferential commitments upon him, which are completely foreign to his outlook on life. This point, in short, boils down to the claim that there are outlooks on life that are relatively incommensurable, as Putnam says. But we have to consider what this means in the light of the fourth point:

(4) No outlook on life is *absolutely* incommensurable with another because they all, although differently, refer to *one* world. As Putnam puts it in 'The Question of Realism': '[...] we can think of our words and thoughts as having determinate reference to objects (when it is clear what sort of "objects" we are talking about and what vocabulary we are using); but there is no one fixed sense of "reference" involved. Accepting the ubiquity of conceptual relativity does not require us to deny that truth genuinely depends on the behaviour of things distant from the speaker, but the nature of the dependence changes as the kinds of language games we invent change.'[40] This statement, again, has to be seen in the context of the fifth point:

(5) Semantic frameworks of the aforesaid non-reductive kind have the 'human weight' – as Wittgenstein formulates it – of being intrinsically embedded in a form of life and therefore expressing practical differences they make in the exchange between the individual and his environment. Putnam interprets Wittgenstein's remark that we can only know whether a believer is using a particular picture by the consequences he does or does not draw including inferential semantic commitments as much as practical commitments.

Let us return to Putnam's statement that God, in being visualized 'as a supremely wise, kind, just person', is 'not an ideal of the same kind as Equality or Justice'. In the light of his understanding and adaptation of Wittgenstein, he makes the point that the meaning of the word 'God' as much as its reference is entirely internal to the particular religious

[39] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, ed. G. Hendrik v. Wright (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1998), p. 83. Cf. Hilary Putnam, 'Does Disquotational Theory Solve All Problems', in Hilary Putnam, *Words and Life* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 277.

[40] Hilary Putnam, 'The Question of Realism', in Hilary Putnam, *Words and Life*, p. 309.

life form which is substantiated and individualized by the texts, rituals and practices of the according religion. The reality of this religion, so to speak, is the life form that entails semantic and practical commitments, which decide what it means to get it right or wrong to be in connection with God. Any claim that the belief in 'God' as a supremely wise, kind, just person (including all inferential commitments implied in calling him wise, just and kind) cannot be meant literally because literally persons have intentional mental states, which are physically embodied and located in space and time, sums up to unfair play. The reason is that claims of this kind mean controlling the believer's understanding of what it is for the picture to have an application by an *antecedently* filled-in version of that very picture, a version that is external to the inferential and consequential commitments of leading the life of a believer.

Putnam's adaptation of Wittgenstein bridges the gap between his critical affirmation of Dewey's *A Common Faith* and his standpoint toward Martin Buber's *I and Thou*, which became one of the later Putnam's focal points in dealing with Jewish philosophy as a guide to life. In Buber's *Ich und Du* Putnam finds the best of what fascinated him in Dewey's and Wittgenstein's thoughts on religion. He finds the trust in enlivening the objective world with the spirit of our ideal strivings – Buber's dictum that the spirit of encountering the world faithfully 'can permeate the It-world and change it', even transfigure the objective world 'to the point where it confronts and represents the you', resulting in a 'Weltleben der Verbundenheit', would not have failed either to impress Dewey or Wittgenstein;[41] moreover the denial that theorizing about God brings us any nearer to an understanding of what it means to address him. Furthermore the conviction that cognizing God is not a question of clarifying assertability conditions of propositions in which God is held to exist or to do certain things, but rather of encouraging oneself to a leap of faith expressed in addressing him; finally that addressing God is an I-Thou-relation not reducible to some sort of an objectifying I-It-relation we have established in subduing the world to our rational control. Whether God is a person, does according to Buber not depend on whether the believer can describe what sort of person God is, but on whether he finds the right tone for addressing him.[42]

[41] Martin Buber, *Ich und Du* (Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider Verlag, 1962), p. 146. Cf. Hilary Putnam, 'What *I and Thou* is really saying', in Hilary Putnam, *Jewish Philosophy*, p. 63.

[42] Cf. Hilary Putnam, 'What *I and Thou* is really saying', p. 66.

How do Johnston and Putnam fit into the picture of the realism-debate? Both take science to generate successful conceptualizations of a mind-independent reality. Nevertheless both also deny the possibility of getting to know things in themselves. In different ways both take the real to transcend our modes of access to it.

Whereas for Johnston our cognitive access to reality is part of the very process through which the real comes into being, Putnam accepts the intrinsic self-limitation of our conceptual faculties, which cannot be bypassed. This difference is deeply related to the way each of them thinks about theism. Johnston's naturalism is religiously charged, Putnam's isn't. Johnston synthesizes naturalism and theism in a form of panentheism, whereas Putnam keeps them apart. According to Johnston religion somehow deepens the naturalist outlook on life, according to Putnam it takes an alternative conceptual approach. To that effect, for Johnston the pictorial dimension of religiously used language is a source of error and misunderstanding (in as far as it contradicts the naturalist account of the world), for Putnam it is flesh to the bone. Johnston is forced to comb through the scripture and sort out what does not fit into the naturalist view; Putnam is exposed to the limits of context-dependent understandability.

Where does Johnston's naturalistic account of religion leave us on Taylor's 'intermediate positions' between traditional theism and modern naturalism as competing worldviews in a secular age? Johnston explicitly addresses young and intelligent readers who refuse to build their individual view of life on 'less than convincing authority'. This reader is invited to prove himself – and for himself – which ones of the biblical texts speak the language of 'spiritual materialism' and which ones express authentic belief. 'The spiritual materialist is unauthentic in his engagement with religion [...], precisely because he simply turns his ordinary unredeemed desires toward some supposedly spiritual realm.'[43] Much of the description of the Highest One in the three monotheisms 'is at best metaphor, allegory, a series of honorific titles, or a web of analogy'.[44] Since the biblical books were written by humans, they are exposed to their weaknesses from vanity over envy, envy-driven ambition, fear, resentment and superstition. This explains the many faces of idolatry, which the reader faces in the bible and in the theological tradition of

[43] Ibid., p. 16.

[44] Johnston, op. cit., p. 99.

its interpretation. Idolatry, Johnston says, is based on intentions to take partial representations of God as his authentic embodiments; it consists of ignorance toward the demands of devotional self-decentration; it contains the invention of subjectively beneficiary *Hinterwelten* and an afterlife in them; it means the domestification of religious experience in favour of egocentric motives: 'Instead of God's appearing as the wholly other, the numinous One who transcends anything that we can master by way of our own efforts, he appears as a potential patron, a powerful ally whom we might win over to our side.'[45] Idolatrous projections of the 'insecurities associated with the patriarchal psychological structure of ancient Near Eastern tribal life'[46] range from episodic narratives like Christ's Ascension from the Mount of Olives[47] to grand biblical narrations like the Apocalypse – which Johnston takes to derive from revengeful prejudices against non-believers. Authentic belief, to the contrary, 'is an orientation in which the Highest One comes into view, with salvific effect'.[48] In sum: The intermediate position Johnston proposes results in radical individualism that denies the authority of canonical text corpora as well as religious communities, which are based on tradition: One might paraphrase Johnston's position – using Grace Davies' pertinent formulation in a rather different sense – as *believing without belonging*.

Putnam fits quit differently into Taylor's range of intermediate positions. With reference to Buber's *Zwei Glaubensweisen* we may conclude that Putnam defends a form of *belonging without believing*, 'believing' meant in terms of acknowledging supposed facts as opposed to trusting somebody even without sound reasons that might legitimate this trust. According to Buber, faith in this second mode of trust is something man discovers as belonging to a community, whereas faith in the other mode is something that qualifies the believer in his solitude, whose community with others is not already there but being constituted as an alliance of those who have converted to the acknowledgement of supposed facts.[49] Putnam's approach is 'communitarian' in stressing a commonly shared praxis of articulating religious worldviews in their own language. This also seems to be the upshot of how Putnam has

[45] Ibid., p. 23.
[46] Ibid., p. 63.
[47] Ibid., p. 45.
[48] Ibid.
[49] M. Buber, *Zwei Glaubensweisen* (Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider Verlag, 1994), pp. 11ff.

come to terms with his own religious commitment. In 1975 the older of Putnam's two sons announced that he wanted to have a bar mitzvah. Putnam, not belonging to a minyan, had nevertheless become acquainted with the Rabbi of one of the Jewish congregations around Harvard. 'So when I had to find a place for my son to have his bar mitzvah, I found it natural to go and talk to Rabbi Gold about the possibility of Samuel having the ceremony in the Worship and Study congregation. We agreed that my wife and I would come to services with Samuel for a year, and that he would study with a Jewish student [...] to prepare for the ceremony. Long before the year was over, the Jewish service and Jewish prayers had become an essential part of our lives, and Rabbi Gold continues to be our teacher and friend to this day.'[50]

To sum up the result of my comparison between Putnam and Johnston: Both authors show that intermediate positions between naturalism and theism are conceptually plausible without having to deny that the conflicting worldviews are about a mind-independent reality. Johnston bridges the gap between naturalism and theism by developing a panentheistic worldview, Putnam denies the necessity of bridging it by choosing an attitude toward the world that allows for the coexistence of at least partly incommensurable conceptualizations of what there is. In both cases the conceptual exploration of intermediate positions is fed by the authors' commitment to intellectual integrity in coming to terms with the tension between scientific explanation and religious interpretation in the age of applied sciences.

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[50] Hilary Putnam, *Jewish Philosophy*, p. 2.

PRAGMATIST PERSPECTIVES ON THEOLOGICAL AND RELIGIOUS REALISM

SAMI PIHLSTRÖM

Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies & University of Jyväskylä

Abstract. This essay first applies the general issue of realism vs. antirealism to theology and the philosophy of religion, distinguishing between several different 'levels' of the realism dispute in this context. A pragmatic approach to the problem of realism regarding religion and theology is sketched and tentatively defended. The similarities and differences of scientific realism, on the one hand, and religious and/or theological realism, on the other hand, are thereby also illuminated. The concept of recognition is shown to be crucially relevant to the issue of realism especially in its pragmatist articulation.

INTRODUCTION

When examining the problems and prospects of realism in religion and theology, we should begin by *contextualizing* the realism vs. antirealism debate (or, better, debates) into different local problem areas.[1] I will begin with some brief remarks on relatively standard varieties of realism (or the problem of realism) and then move on to applications of these realisms in the field of the philosophy of religion. Toward the end of the essay, I will introduce my own preferred pragmatist perspective on the realism controversy, enriched with a notion not usually employed by pragmatist philosophers, namely, the notion of recognition.

[1] See, for instance, Ilkka Niiniluoto, *Critical Scientific Realism* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), for a very helpful classification of different forms of realism. A major recent collection of articles on various aspects of the realism issue is Kenneth R. Westphal (ed.), *Realism, Science, and Pragmatism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014).

First of all, as is well known, realism has been a major theme in the philosophy of science over the past few decades, and continues to be actively discussed by philosophers of science. According to *scientific realism*, there 'really' are unobservable theoretical entities postulated in scientific theories (or, in a somewhat more careful formulation, it is up to the world itself to determine *whether or not* there are such entities); those theories have truth-values independently of our knowledge and experience; and scientific progress may be understood as convergence toward mind-independently objective ('correspondence') truth about the world. These features of scientific realism may, furthermore, have more specific applications in sub-fields such as the philosophy of physics, the philosophy of biology, or the philosophy of history. Another interesting example is *mathematical realism*, according to which numbers and other mathematical entities and/or structures somehow mind-independently exist (possibly in a Platonic world of eternal Forms), and our mathematical truths about them are mind-independently what they are.

Clearly, the realism debate is not restricted to the philosophy of science. In ethics (or, rather, metaethics), *moral realism* has been a major topic of dispute for decades, too. This controversy is about whether there are objective moral values and/or mind-independent moral truths about 'moral facts' (or, perhaps better, about the nature of the moral values there mind-independently are, or are not). Just as the scientific realist believes in the objective truth-values of scientific theories, even when they postulate observation-transcendent theoretical entities and structures, and the antirealist denies that theories have such truth-values, especially insofar as they are about the unobservable, the moral realist maintains that moral statements are objectively true or false (even though their truth or falsehood cannot, of course, be immediately perceived), while the antirealist argues that this is not the case (for instance, for the reason that moral 'statements' are not really factual statements at all but moral discourse is, instead, mere expression of attitudes, such as emotions). More generally, *axiological realism* is the view that values (including not only moral but also aesthetic, epistemic, and other values) are real, instead of being mere human projections or constructions.

Highly important dimensions of the realism issue are also discussed and debated in relation to other traditional core areas of philosophy, such as general metaphysics. For example, the *modal realist* seeks to formulate a realistic account of the modalities, i.e., possibilities and necessities. According to such realism, possibilities, for instance, are 'real' – or there

are real possible worlds in addition to the actual world. A related – and ancient – form of realism is *realism about universals*, that is, the kind of realism about the Forms that may (or may not) be instantiated in particular objects that classical philosophers like Plato and Aristotle (in their different ways) maintained. Metaphysicians and epistemologists have also debated about *realism about the past* (and about future, or about temporality in general). The question here is whether past (and future) objects and events really mind- and discourse-independently exist and whether statements about the past – analogously to statements about the unobservable world in science – have objective truth-values. And many other examples of realism and antirealism in different subfields of philosophy can easily be distinguished. These are all, as we may say, different *local* versions of realism (vs. antirealism).

These contextualizations or localizations of the problem of realism are to be distinguished from the quite different distinctions between the various philosophical dimensions of the general or *global* realism issue that concerns the mind- and discourse-independence (vs. dependence) of reality in general. The *ontological* realism question is, of course, whether there is a mind- and language-independent world at all. *Epistemologically*, we may ask whether we can know something (or anything) about such an independent world. The *semantic realist*, furthermore, maintains that we can refer to such a world by using our language and/or concepts; according to such realism, our statements about the world are mind-independently true or false, and truth is typically construed as correspondence with the way things are. All these differentiations between the dimensions of realism and antirealism can also be applied more locally to the kind of issues preliminarily listed above. For example, scientific or modal realism can be discussed from the point of view of the ontological, epistemological, or semantic dimension of the realism issue.[2]

[2] There has also been some debate over which dimension is the most important one. Michael Devitt is famous for the view that realism is a purely ontological thesis about the mind-independent existence of certain kinds of entities, either about something in general or about specific classes of entities such as the theoretical entities of science. See Devitt, *Realism and Truth*, 2nd ed. (Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1991; 1st ed. 1984). This contrasts with Michael Dummett's equally well-known view that realism is a semantic issue about whether statements of certain types (e.g., about the past) have truth values that are objectively determined. See, e.g., Michael Dummett, *The Seas of Language* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

The concept of *independence* – as well as, conversely, *dependence* – is crucially important for the entire realism discussion. According to typical forms of realism, the world is (largely) independent of various things: minds or subjects; their experiences, perceptions, and observations; concepts or conceptual schemes; language, linguistic frameworks, or language-games; theories and models; scientific paradigms; perspectives or points of view; traditions; practices; and so forth. I will mostly just use 'mind-independent' as a shorthand for all these and other standard forms of independence (to be contrasted with the relevant kinds of dependence). Furthermore, it should be noted that, in the realism discussion, the relevant concept of (in)dependence is, at least primarily, *ontological*: A is ontologically dependent on B, if and only if A cannot (or could not) exist unless B exists. Different modal forces are of course invoked insofar as this definition is formulated in terms of 'cannot' or 'could not', respectively. This ontological notion of (in)dependence, in both stronger ('could not') and weaker ('cannot') modal versions, is to be distinguished from, for example, *logical* (in)dependence and *causal* (in)dependence. Statements or theories are logically independent of each other insofar as there is no logical entailment between them. (It is hard to say in what sense exactly the notions of logical dependence and independence could even be applied to the relation between, say, a statement and a non-linguistic fact, insofar as entailment is a relation between logical, propositional, and/or linguistic entities.) Regarding causal dependence and independence, we may say that, for example, a table is causally dependent on its maker but ontologically independent of her/him because it can continue to exist when s/he dies. When made, its existence no more ontologically presupposes its maker's existence – even though antirealists may deny that the table, or anything, could exist entirely independently of human beings' thought, language, or experience.

Now that we have reached a preliminary conception of what kinds of realism there are, globally and locally, we should also get clear about the different varieties of antirealism. There are, in fact, many quite distinct antirealisms, or several ways of being an antirealist, both globally and locally. An easy way of listing such antirealisms would be to just list the denials of the corresponding realisms. However, let me briefly indicate in what sense some traditionally best-known antirealisms are opposed to realism.

First, *idealism* is often represented as a version of antirealism. The problem here, however, is that idealists can also be realists, depending on how exactly these views are defined (there will be more to be said on this matter below in relation to pragmatism). Another key version of antirealism is, as is well known, *relativism*, according to which the way the world is is relative to, for instance, conceptual schemes or perspectives. There is, then, no way the world is 'in itself', perspective- or scheme-independently. Relativism is often relatively close to *constructivism* (which can also be compared to at least some forms of idealism): we 'construct' the world in and through our perspectival language, discourse, or conceptualization, and it is precisely for this reason that there is no non-relative existence at all. A quite different version of antirealism is *empiricism* (as a view discussed primarily in the philosophy of science), which maintains that only the observable world is real and that metaphysical speculations about the existence of unobservables should be abandoned. According to such empiricism (e.g., instrumentalism), scientific theories should be interpreted as mere instruments of calculation and prediction, instead of sets of mind-independently true or false statements about (unobservable) reality. Furthermore, *nominalism* (in the universals debate) is a form of antirealism in the sense of claiming that there are no mind- and language-independent universals, only particulars. Yet, nominalists could be realists in other ways; for example, several influential contemporary scientific realists are nominalists in metaphysics. The varieties of antirealism are by no means exhausted by these well-known and much disputed doctrines.

Finally, an important distinction ought to be drawn between *antirealisms* and *nonrealisms*. Not all denials of realism can be simply classified as antirealisms. For example, Richard Rorty has repeatedly claimed that his 'antirepresentationalism' leads us beyond the entire issue of realism, which in his view crucially depends on representationalist assumptions, that is, on the idea that the business of language-use is to represent non-linguistic and mind-independent reality and that it may succeed or fail in this task.[3] Another influential nonrealist position in the philosophy of science in particular was formulated in the 1980s by Arthur Fine with the label 'NOA', 'the natural ontological attitude'. The 'NOAist' just accepts the ontological postulations of science, avoiding any further

[3] See, e.g., Richard Rorty, *Truth and Progress* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

philosophical speculation, problematization, or interpretation of them.[4] These nonrealisms, which can be regarded as close relatives, cannot be discussed here, but I want to note that the version of pragmatic realism to be articulated and tentatively defended below is *not* committed to the kind of Rortyan antirepresentationalist neopragmatism that has given a fertile context to nonrealism. It is realism itself that we can and should, I think, save through pragmatism, even though the realism thus saved will have to be a thoroughly revised one. (Similarly, pragmatism may and should accommodate its own specific – pragmatic – notion of representation instead of giving up representationalism altogether.)

After this preliminary survey, we should take a closer look at how the different forms of realism and antirealism – or, more modestly, some key variants of them – are applicable to the philosophy of religion and theology.

APPLYING REALISM(S) TO THEOLOGY AND RELIGION

The problem of realism in theology and religion obviously concerns the (in)dependence of the world and/or objects purportedly referred to in religious and/or theological language-use. These objects could include God, souls, angels, and many other things traditionally postulated in religious practices and theological theorization. At least in principle, it is possible to be a local realist about some of these ontological commitments while being an antirealist about some others: for instance, one could be a realist about God's existence while being an antirealist about angels. That is, one could maintain that it is a mind-independently objective matter whether or not God exists, and which properties God has (if He does exist), while maintaining that statements about the existence of angels, or about their properties, do not have mind-independently determined objective truth-values. Note, however, that at least according to most formulations of realism and antirealism, one does not qualify as an antirealist about God if one just denies God's existence – or as an antirealist about angels if one just denies their existence, because one may very well be a realist about the features of the mind-independent

[4] See Arthur Fine, *The Shaky Game*, 2nd ed. (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996; 1st ed. 1986). I critically discuss Fine's NOA from the point of view of the philosophy of religion in Sami Pihlström, 'A Pragmatic Critique of Three Kinds of Religious Naturalism', *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*, 17 (2005), 177-218.

world itself that make it the case that there is no God, or no angels. Atheism is not antirealism but typically presupposes realism.

There are, to be more precise, different 'levels' of realism about religion. At least four such levels can be distinguished. It is helpful to introduce these distinctions by referring to the relevant relations between practices of language-use and the relevant objects that those practices of language-use can be supposed to be about. First, we may apply the realism issue to religious language itself – that is, to the relation between religious language and its objects (whatever they are). Secondly, we may speak about realism and antirealism in relation to theological (e.g., Christian, Jewish, or Islamic) language and its objects. Thirdly, we may distinguish the language of non-confessional religious studies (or comparative religion) – and its objects – from the first two levels. Fourthly, and finally, the language of philosophy of religion – and its objects, whatever they might be – is a yet higher 'meta-level' context for investigating realism in relation to religion.

Accordingly, when asking whether to be realists or antirealists about religious matters, we may ask this question at four different levels (at least), that is, as the question of whether there are, e.g., mind-independent truths about objective reality in (1) religion, (2) theology, (3) religious studies, and (4) philosophy of religion. Let us pursue these questions in turn.

First, according to *religious realism*, the objects of religious beliefs and/or statements (e.g., God) exist, or fail to exist, independently of religious language-use. That is to say, God is real or unreal independently of whether you, I, or anyone believes Him to be real. If God exists, He will continue to exist even if no one believes in His existence.[5] And conversely, if God does not exist, He will not come into existence no matter how strongly He is believed in. Religious antirealism denies

[5] In a more careful presentation of religious realism (and antirealism), it would be important to distinguish between *reality* and *existence*. One might, for instance, construe God along the lines of Charles S. Peirce's 'extreme scholastic realism' as a 'real general', arguing that God does not exist in the way in which particular objects, such as stones or galaxies, exist but is nevertheless real in the way in which general tendencies, habits, or modalities (e.g., laws of nature) are. Accordingly, God would be something like a general world-process instead of being a mere individual entity existing in the world. On Peirce's realism about generality, see a number of influential essays collected in *The Essential Peirce*, 2 vols, The Peirce Edition Project, ed. Nathan Houser et al. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992-98), including the famous 1871 'Berkeley Review' (in vol. 1) and several later essays on pragmatism and pragmaticism (in vol. 2).

this independence and regards God as mind-dependent in some sense, for instance, as a construction based on religious language-use, or a discourse-independent construal, as some postmodernist orientations in philosophy of religion might put it.

Secondly, according to *theological realism*, certain theological doctrines are mind-independently true or false, depending only on the way the (religious) world objectively is. For example, the doctrine of divine simplicity – that is, the view that God is the simplest possible object, which may also be taken to entail the view that all of God's attributes, such as His absolute goodness and omnipotence, are identical to God himself – is either true or false depending on the true metaphysical nature of God. Either God is the way this doctrine says He is, or He is not that way; it is not up to the theological doctrine to determine what God's metaphysical nature is, but it is the other way round. The truth or falsity of the doctrine is grounded in the nature of the world, and of God. The theological antirealist, again, denies such independence, maintaining that the truth or falsity of the kind of doctrines at issue here depends on their theological formulation, or our theological perspectives on God and the world.

It may, however, be difficult to draw the exact line between religious and theological language-use, and the corresponding versions of realism (and antirealism), although generally theological doctrines could be regarded as meta-level interpretations of actual religious beliefs. Christological, pneumatological, soteriological, and other sophisticated interpretations of Christian beliefs – regarding, respectively, the nature of Christ, the Holy Spirit, and salvation – can be regarded as doctrines belonging to this set of meta-level theological construals of 'first-order' religious beliefs. A 'normal' believer need not, and typically does not, have the kind of theological sophistication that the formulation and understanding of these doctrines requires. One's entitlement to religious realism cannot therefore depend on one's being a realist (or an antirealist) about the meta-level theological doctrines.

One could, then, in principle, be a religious realist about, say, the existence of Christ but an antirealist about some more specific theological views, such as the doctrine of Christ's second coming. But could one be a theological realist while being a religious antirealist? This would, presumably, be an awkward position. One could hardly reasonably maintain that the truth-values of claims about Christ's second coming are mind-independent and objective while denying such

mind-independence and objectivity to claims about God's existence. Furthermore, it may also be difficult to determine what it is to be a realist about Christ if one is not committed to the theological doctrines that *define* Christ. Which specific doctrines should be taken to play such a defining role? This may be a matter of theological dispute. Does Christ (or, for that matter, God) have only essential properties or also contingent ones? *Could* one, then, be an antirealist about a doctrine such as Christ's second coming, let alone a highly central doctrine such as Christ's resurrection (or, say, Christ's two natures), without also being an antirealist at the basic religious level about God?[6]

The third level to be discussed is the problem of *realism about religious studies*. This may be compared to the more general realism issue that arises in the *human sciences* (such as history, anthropology, cultural studies, literary theory, and other fields): is the human cultural and social world also mind-independently and objectively the way it is (more or less like the scientific realist about natural science believes the natural world to be), so that truths about it are determined independently of our theories and discourses, or is it somehow a human cultural-theoretical construct, possibly in a stronger sense than the natural world? The age-old nature vs. culture distinction is of course in some sense presupposed here. Scientific realism in the natural sciences must certainly be distinguished from realism about the humanities and social sciences. There is clearly a sense in which human culture and society are human and therefore mind-dependent constructs, but the intended sense of 'independence' should be understood correctly here; certainly there is no a priori reason why one could not apply realism across the board, not only in the sciences but also in the humanities. Even if it may not be easy to regard human sciences such as literary theory as pursuing objective truth in

[6] Theological and religious views and problems may also influence our views on realism in other domains: for example, *the problem of evil* has typically been discussed presupposing moral realism; it may look quite different if one begins from moral antirealism. Cf. T.L. Carson, 'Axiology, Realism, and the Problem of Evil', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 75 (2007), 349-368. Carson argues that J.L. Mackie (a famous critic of moral realism and theism) seems to assume the truth of moral realism in his discussion of the problem of evil (see Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism: Arguments For and Against the Existence of God* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1983)), because he assumes that pain or suffering is mind-independently bad or evil. For a discussion of the problem of evil in relation to pragmatist philosophy of religion, see Sami Pihlström, *Pragmatic Pluralism and the Problem of God* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), chapter 5.

the same sense in which we may regard physics or biology as pursuing objective truth, there is no principled reason why our statements and theories in these different fields could not be objectively true or false depending on the ways in which the (admittedly very different) objects of study are. The objects of the human sciences are not independent of human thought and action, but they could still be independent of the theorist's or scholar's views and experiences in a sense relevantly similar to the mind-independence of physical particles.

Now, insofar as religious studies (or comparative religion) is part of the 'human sciences' in the same sense as history or anthropology are, the realism debate in the latter is directly applicable to the former, or the former is only a special case of the latter. Of course it must be kept in mind that the social and cultural world of religion, any more than the cultural world generally, is not 'mind-independent' in the same sense as physical nature is (according to the realist); yet, again, it can (arguably) be independent of the researchers' – the religious studies scholars' – minds, or of their theories, in an analogous sense.[7]

The relation between religious studies and theology is far from clear, however. Theological doctrines, such as (again) divine simplicity or Christ's second coming, could be and often are seen as 'confessional': to be a Christian is to maintain that these and many other doctrines about God, Christ, and related matters are true (though it may be open to further discussion what it practically means in religious life to be committed to their truth).[8] However, theological doctrines can

[7] Does the 'miracle argument', which we owe to philosophers of science such as Hilary Putnam and Richard Boyd, work in theology or religious studies? This further question, though highly interesting, cannot be pursued here. The miracle argument – as analyzed and defended, for instance, in Putnam's *Mathematics, Matter, and Method* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975) – is the argument according to which only realism can adequately explain the fact that science has been enormously successful in its practical applications, including technology. Unless the theories in advanced sciences were at least approximately true and unless the theoretical terms of those theories (at least approximately) referred to real entities in the world, this success of science would be a 'miracle', an unexplainable cosmic coincidence. The reason why there may be no clear analogy to this argument in either theology or religious studies is that there may be no clearly identifiable empirical success to be explained. At least the question about the empirical and/or practical success of these disciplines is much less straightforward.

[8] Perhaps one *could*, after all, be a realist about theological doctrines in the sense of claiming that they are objectively true or false, while being an antirealist about their implementations in actual religious life, viewing such life as a matter of symbols and rituals rather than any propositionally expressible theological commitments.

also be studied entirely 'neutrally' and non-confessionally as objects of religious believers' (and theologians') beliefs – and the one who engages in such non-confessional study need not at all engage in the practices, either religious or theological, within which those beliefs are actually maintained, or taken to be true. Thus, it may be a result of theological inquiry that a religious group X maintains, or has maintained at some point in its history, a doctrine Y (e.g., as interpreted in a certain way). Is this still theology, or is it, rather, religious studies? Or perhaps comparative religion? The disciplinary identities may be extremely unclear here. In the Nordic countries, for instance, theology is usually understood as a non-confessional study of religious beliefs, doctrines, practices, their history, etc. The theologian need not be committed to the doctrines s/he studies, or to any religious ideas. This is the case, for instance, at the University of Helsinki Faculty of Theology in Finland. In some other religious and theological traditions, it may be harder to understand, or even inconceivable, that one could engage in theology while avoiding religious commitments altogether.

If theology can be pursued without commitments to any Christian or other theological doctrines, then there is no fundamental distinction between theology and religious studies, nor between the relevant versions of the realism vs. antirealism debate. The same general points about realism in the human sciences will then apply to religious studies and theology alike. However, if theology is interpreted confessionally, then one could be a realist about a theological doctrine while being an antirealist about a meta-level interpretation and/or explanation of that doctrine within non-confessional religious studies (comparative religion). But is the converse position coherent? Could one be a realist about a non-confessional interpretation of a religious doctrine about which one is a theological antirealist? I am tempted to answer affirmatively. One can of course be a realist about, for example, historical issues regarding the emergence, prevalence, and maintenance of certain theological ideas and/or views in certain historical or contemporary communities while rejecting theological realism about those ideas themselves. One need not be a realist about, say, angels, even if one is a strong realist about religious studies examining people's and communities' beliefs in angels. Even so, it might be more natural to maintain a realistic commitment across the board, at both levels.

Fourthly, how about philosophy (of religion)? Things get even more complicated when the philosophy of religion enters the picture

to supplement the practices of religion, theology, and religious studies. Philosophy of religion can be more or less directly concerned with religious concepts and beliefs, but it can also examine their relation to both theological interpretations and non-confessional explanations and accounts offered within religious studies. We may here also want to distinguish, on the one hand, philosophy of religion, and on the other hand, philosophy of science – or something corresponding to the philosophy of science – as applied to (i) the 'science' of theology (if it can be regarded as a science in any sense) and to (ii) the inquiries within religious studies.

Does philosophy of religion have any 'objects of its own'? Can one be a realist (or an antirealist) about the language used within the philosophy of religion, and the relation between that language-use and its relevant objects? Arguably, the complex *relations* between the objects of religion, theology, and religious studies, and the relations between the different ways (different languages) of speaking about those objects, can be among the 'objects' of the philosophy of religion.

The more general question, not to be answered here, is whether there can be mind-independent and objective facts about philosophical theories and their actual or potential objects at all. Is there, moreover, a mind-independent and objective truth about, say, realism itself (or other topics in the philosophy of religion, such as the nature of evil)? That is, is it objectively and mind-independently true or false that realism holds, or does not hold, about religious views, about theological doctrines, or about the results of religious studies inquiries? (Are the statements made in this essay on realism mind-independently and objectively true or false, accurately representing a subject matter independent of them?) The 'reality' studied by the philosophy of religion should include *all* the levels of the realism debate: religious and theological entities (e.g., God), as well as relevant human activities within which such entities – and questions concerning their existence – are referred to, spoken about, and inquired into.

As has become clear through this discussion, however preliminary it must remain, there is a certain analogy between scientific realism and the different realisms applied to religion and theology. However, even though this analogy may be helpful, it may also be seriously misleading; at least we should be careful to avoid *too easy* analogies. The entire attempt to discuss theological realism by means of an analogy to scientific realism is, arguably, problematic, as it presupposes an *evidentialist* view of

theology as relevantly comparable to science. According to evidentialism, religious beliefs – as well as, by extension, their theological meta-level interpretations – need to be evaluated on the basis of the rationally acceptable evidence that can be presented in their favour, just as one would generally evaluate scientific (and everyday) beliefs. Realism and antirealism cannot, then, be strictly separated from the *evidentialism vs. fideism* issue (although these two issues are in principle distinct); this is part of a broadly Kantian entanglement of metaphysics and epistemology. Pragmatism (which we will discuss below in a bit more detail) rejects evidentialism, while also rejecting straightforward versions of fideism, and hence also the direct scientific realism analogy.

When developing a pragmatist approach to the realism debate (in science, religion, and theology – and elsewhere), the *genuine differences* between all these practices must be appreciated. This, we might say, is to embrace a 'practical realism' about the realism debate itself.[9]

A PRAGMATIST APPROACH TO THE REALISM DEBATE

The philosophical tradition of pragmatism offers a fresh perspective on the realism vs. antirealism issue. The rest of this paper is devoted to showing – inevitably only very briefly – what the pragmatist contribution might be, and how it could, especially in the philosophy of religion, be enriched by considerations adapted from the theory of recognition.

The so-called classical pragmatists – Charles S. Peirce, William James, and John Dewey[10] – all defended views that can be regarded as to some

[9] Cf. Rein Vihalemm, 'Practical Realism: Against Standard Scientific Realism and Anti-Realism', *Studia Philosophia Estonica*, 5:2 (2012), 7-22. For example, the criticism of the 'realist aims' of theology by Wang-Yen Lee (see Lee, 'A Pragmatic Case against Pragmatic Theological Realism', *The Heythrop Journal*, 50 (2009), 479-494) by analogy to *constructive empiricism* starts from the problematic assumption that theological theories are to be seen as 'scientific', in principle open to similar empirical considerations as scientific theories. I am not sure that 'theological constructive empiricism' even makes any sense (even though constructive empiricism about religious studies *might* make sense, while I would certainly not recommend maintaining that, or any, version of constructive empiricism as an alternative to (pragmatic) scientific realism). For a treatment of pragmatism as a third option between evidentialism and fideism, as well as realism and antirealism, in the philosophy of religion, see Pihlström, *Pragmatic Pluralism and the Problem of God* (cited above).

[10] For a collection of historical and systematic discussions of pragmatism, old and new, see Sami Pihlström (ed.), *The Continuum Companion to Pragmatism* (London and New York: Continuum, 2011).

extent realistic but to some extent anti- or nonrealistic – or, if not strictly speaking antirealistic, at least in some sense idealistic or constructivist (even though it also needs to be pointed out that none of the classical pragmatists was really tempted to defend any form of relativism). The tensions we find in these thinkers' positions regarding realism and its alternatives illuminate the ways in which the realism issue has been and continues to be at the heart of the pragmatist tradition in philosophy.[11] A similar tension seems to be at work in contemporary neopragmatism, that is, in the thought of philosophers like Richard Rorty and Hilary Putnam. In theology and philosophy of religion specifically, this tradition has more recently been represented by figures such as Eberhard Herrmann and Dirk-Martin Grube.[12]

Pragmatism can be seen as a philosophical approach seeking to *mediate between realism and antirealism* in a manner comparable to Immanuel Kant's attempt to argue that empirical realism is compatible with (and even requires) transcendental idealism. More critically, this means that the realism vs. antirealism tension is indeed inevitably present in pragmatism, both classical and 'neo'. However, the pragmatists have typically attempted to move beyond this tension in interesting ways. The relevant tension that needs to be dealt with here can be briefly expressed as follows: the world is (empirically) independent of us, but its independence is itself a human construct within our purposive practices

[11] See Pihlström, *Pragmatic Pluralism and the Problem of God*, as well as my earlier works on pragmatism and realism, including Sami Pihlström, 'Structuring the World: The Issue of Realism and the Nature of Ontological Problems in Classical and Contemporary Pragmatism', *Acta Philosophica Fennica*, 59 (Helsinki: The Philosophical Society of Finland, 1996). See also Sami Pihlström, 'Pragmatic Realism', forthcoming in Westphal (ed.), *Realism, Science, and Pragmatism* (cited above).

[12] See, e.g., Eberhard Herrmann, 'A Pragmatic Realist Philosophy of Religion', *Ars Disputandi*, 3 (2003), available at: <www.arsdisputandi.org>. See also Herrmann, 'Realism, Semantics and Religion', in Timo Koistinen and Tommi Lehtonen (eds.), *Philosophical Studies in Religion, Metaphysics and Ethics* (Helsinki: Luther-Agricola Society, 1997), 77-94. In this essay, Herrmann draws on Putnam in arguing that sciences and 'views of life' such as religions have different functions and hence different notions of truth. In the latter, being true means not 'to be the case' (as in science) but to be 'true to life' in a qualitative sense, with true expressions being 'adequate expressions of what it means to be a human being' (p. 92). See also, for an excellent recent contribution to a re-evaluation of the pragmatist perspective on theological and religious realism along broadly Putnamian lines, Niek Brunsveld, *The Many Faces of Religious Truth: Developing Hilary Putnam's Pragmatic Pluralism into an Alternative for Religious Realism and Antirealism* (Diss., University of Utrecht, The Netherlands, 2012).

and may receive different forms within different practices. Moreover, the world and whatever exists or is real within it can exhibit a number of different practice-laden forms of mind-independence. For example, the mind-independence of electrons, of historical facts, and of God (if, indeed, all of these entities or structures are mind-independently real) are all quite different kinds of mind-independence, and it makes sense to speak about these different kinds only within different purposive practices in which they play some functional roles. The practice of physical science within which the independent existence of electrons is at issue does not, presumably, have any role for God to play, but on the other hand the religious person's prayer addressed to a God believed to be real independently of that activity of praying hardly presupposes that electrons, or any other pieces of the material world, are real. There is no need to reduce all these to the same essence of what it means to be mind-independent. Pragmatic realism – if we may use such a label – is itself 'practice-involving', not just a view maintained for 'practical' (e.g., non-theoretical or instrumental) reasons. Rearticulating realism itself, like religion, in terms of human practices is the key program of pragmatic realism. This program is very different from the more radical neopragmatist program of giving up realism, or even the issue of realism altogether (as Rorty suggests).

Some contemporary pragmatists, including Eberhard Herrmann, have suggested that the realism issue in religion and theology can be fruitfully articulated in terms of Putnam's distinction between *internal and metaphysical realism*.[13] According to Herrmann, Putnam's internal realism can plausibly be used as a model for realism in theology and religion. While I am not entirely convinced by this proposal, let me briefly recapitulate the main points of Putnam's form of realism; this will only serve as an example of an influential and theologically relevant version of neopragmatism here.

One of Putnam's characterizations of the difference between internal and metaphysical realism is based on his observation that our perceptions and conceptions of the world are relative to language and/or conceptual schemes, since 'elements of what we call "language" or "mind" *penetrate so deeply into what we call "reality" that the very project of representing ourselves as being "mappers" of something "language-independent" is*

[13] See the publications cited in the previous note, including Brunsveld's 2012 dissertation.

fatally compromised from the very start'.[14] This formulation seems to employ a relatively straightforward idea of language-dependence (or mind-dependence). The contrasting view, metaphysical realism, maintains that we can, in principle at least, theorize about a language- and mind-independent world *an sich*, as it is independently of our thoughts and language-use. The basic point of internal realism is that there is no such external, disengaged viewpoint available for us. All our engagements with reality begin from an internal standpoint that already involves human practices and linguistic categorizations of reality. One way of summarizing this distinction between two kinds of realism is by saying that metaphysical realism dreams of a *theocentric* conception of the world, while internal realism argues that we human beings cannot get rid of our *anthropocentric*, and therefore inevitably limited and contextual, ways of coping with reality. This corresponds to the way in which the world has, in the pragmatist tradition more generally, been seen as a 'human world', as in a way plastic or malleable to human beings' purposeful actions and practice-related conceptual categorization.[15]

A pragmatist perspective on theological realism can be summarized in terms of the following key points, which arguably represent the main strengths of pragmatism in comparison to more standard versions of theological/religious realism and antirealism. First, pragmatism should be firmly set *against scientism* (e.g., strong and reductive forms of scientific realism): non-scientific perspectives and practices are equally important for us as scientific ones. Secondly, even if scientific realism in its strongest forms cannot be accepted, there is, nevertheless, a kind of *realistic spirit* operative in pragmatism.[16] This is especially clear in

[14] Hilary Putnam, *Realism with a Human Face*, ed. James Conant (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1990), p. 28.

[15] See, e.g., William James, *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking* (1907), eds. Frederick H. Burkhardt, Fredson Bowers, and Ignas K. Skrupskelis (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1975), chapter 8. On the distinction between theocentric and anthropocentric perspectives as parallel to the Kantian distinction between transcendental realism and transcendental idealism, see Henry E. Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism: An Interpretation and Defense – a Revised and Enlarged Edition* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 2004; 1st ed. 1983). On Putnam's approach to metaphysical issues in the philosophy of religion, see also Hilary Putnam, 'God and the Philosophers', *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, 31 (1997), 175-187.

[16] I am adopting the phrase 'realistic spirit' from Cora Diamond's Wittgenstein-inspired work; see her *The Realistic Spirit* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press,

James's reflections on the brute reality of pain, suffering, evil, and death; these ethically pregnant themes seem to be, for the Jamesian pragmatist, in the end much more important than purely theoretical construals of realism vs. antirealism. More generally, thirdly, it can be argued that *ethics and metaphysics* are deeply entangled in pragmatism, both in early pragmatism such as James's and in more recent pragmatism such as Putnam's. According to these pragmatists, there is a sense in which our metaphysical construals and categorizations of reality depend on our ethical perspectives; thus, the relevant realism issues are also entangled.[17]

These basic points about pragmatism correspond to the ways in which I see pragmatism as a major promise in the philosophy of religion more generally. *Epistemically*, pragmatism seeks to move beyond the evidentialism vs. fideism controversy and to thereby transform the debates on the rationality vs. irrationality and objectivity vs. subjectivity of religious belief (both of which are closely related to, while not being identical with, the realism vs. antirealism issue). *Existentially*, pragmatism, at least in the form in which I am hoping to develop it, seeks to move beyond 'theodicist' attempts to solve the problem of evil; responding to the reality of evil – in a 'realistic spirit' – is thereby seen as a major challenge for any ethically serious religious and theological thought.[18] The epistemic and the existential challenges in contemporary philosophy of religion are, of course, entangled – as should be clear, for instance, on the basis of the undeniable relevance of moral realism and antirealism to the problem of evil.

There are also further pragmatist ideas that may seem to be only indirectly related to realism but are nevertheless relevant to it. For example, most pragmatists have been *non-reductive naturalists* of some kind; the key example of such a position in the philosophy of religion would be

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1991). See also Sami Pihlström, 'Pragmatic Pluralism and Realism in the Philosophy of Religion', in Henrik Rydenfelt and Sami Pihlström (eds.), *William James on Religion* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013), pp. 78-107.

[17] See Sami Pihlström, *Pragmatist Metaphysics: An Essay on the Ethical Grounds of Ontology* (London: Continuum, 2009). Putnam's key work in this area is Hilary Putnam, *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2002).

[18] I briefly deal with these epistemic and existential challenges in Sami Pihlström, 'Rationality, Recognition, and Anti-Theodicy: On the Promise of Pragmatist Philosophy of Religion', *Pragmatism Today*, 4:2 (2013), available at: <http://www.pragmatismtoday.eu>. See also Pihlström, *Pragmatic Pluralism and the Problem of God*, chapter 5.

Dewey's pragmatic religious naturalism.[19] Moreover, pragmatists' general attempt to occupy a middle ground between realism and antirealism leads to the need to examine the complex relation between *relativism and pluralism*. It must be somehow secured that the idea of a plurality of acceptable (and, possibly, equally rational) human practices and perspectives does not lead to a full-blown relativism according to which there are in the end no normative standards governing human reason-use and theorization at all, or no reasonable choices to be made between rival perspectives. Finally, the relations between *religion, ethics, and politics* need to be taken very seriously by any pragmatist who claims that philosophy of religion ought to make a difference to the ways in which human beings live in this world. That is, what is the place of religion in the public sphere, and how should it, possibly, be reconsidered? While this issue may not seem to be closely related to the problem of realism, it can be argued that it does in the end have a deep connection with that issue. Ethical and political realism need to be reconsidered from the point of view of the problem of introducing, or reintroducing, religious and theological perspectives into public discussions. (This paper will not take any stand on this set of problems; I am just mentioning this topic as an example of the way in which pragmatist philosophy of religion can seek to be truly practically relevant.)

All these aspects of pragmatist philosophy of religion have dimensions that touch the realism debate. For example, should we settle the realism issue (at some specific level) before making any commitments regarding 'religion in the public sphere'? Or can we leave the realism issue open? Furthermore, when developing pragmatic religious or theological realism, the multi-level structure of the realism issue examined in the previous section must be kept in mind: one could be a pragmatic realist about religion while being an antirealist about theology or religious studies, or vice versa. These commitments arguably require *holistic* pragmatic assessment.[20]

[19] See John Dewey, *A Common Faith* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1991; first published 1934).

[20] The 'holistic pragmatism' defended by Morton White, e.g., in his *A Philosophy of Culture: The Scope of Holistic Pragmatism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), could at this point be invoked as a systematization of pragmatist philosophy of religion and pragmatist methodology in general. That must remain to be discussed on another occasion, however.

RECOGNITION AND RECOGNITION-TRANSCENDENCE

The pragmatist philosopher of religion may, furthermore, apply the (broadly Hegelian) concept of *recognition* (*Anerkennung*): it may be argued that our religious identities are largely based on relations of mutual recognition – loosely employing the concept of recognition as articulated by Axel Honneth and his many followers and critics.[21] One key idea here, keeping in mind the general entanglement of ethics and metaphysics in pragmatism, is that the ethical relations of recognition may be primary to the ontological relations constituting our identities. Could the relations between realists and antirealists also be analyzed in terms of recognition? In particular, how should we make sense of the idea of recognizing a person (or a community) as being committed to shared norms of rational thought and/or inquiry (that is, as a member of the same community of inquirers)?[22] Furthermore, how exactly should we distinguish between the notions of recognition, tolerance, and agreement – and make sense of the fact that these are, indeed, different notions, playing somewhat different roles in our habits of action and in our practices of sharing an ethically problematic world with other human beings?

Instead of attempting to provide answers to these questions, let alone a general treatment of recognition in the philosophy of religion, even just pragmatist philosophy of religion, let me in the rest of this essay take up the more specific theme concerning recognition and *recognition-transcendence* in pragmatic realism. There is a sense in which antirealism, e.g., relativism or fideism about religion (both culminating in some kind of rejection of objectivity), *makes recognition too easy*: we can certainly (mutually) recognize each other as utterers of 'inarticulate sounds' or as mere 'enunciators' whose words have no normatively evaluable content.[23]

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[21] Cf. Axel Honneth, *Kampf um Anerkennung*, 2nd ed. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003; first published 1992). For a recent attempt to apply the concept of recognition to theology, see Risto Saarinen, 'Anerkennungstheorien und ökumenische Theologie', in T. Bremer (ed.), *Ökumene – überdacht* (Quaestiones disputatae 259, Freiburg: Herder, 2013), pp. 237-261. I make my own first preliminary attempt to connect pragmatism and the theory of recognition with each other in the field of philosophy of religion in Pihlström, 'Rationality, Recognition, and Anti-Theodicy' (cited above).

[22] Arguably, the Kantian idea of a moral community is based on a mutual recognition among autonomous agents necessary for this (and therefore recognition is not only a Hegelian notion). I am grateful to Philip Rossi for a discussion of this point.

[23] I am here helping myself to phrases familiar from Wittgensteinian and Putnamian contexts. Cf., e.g., Hilary Putnam, *Words and Life*, ed. James Conant (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1994).

This is what relativism, arguably, ultimately leads to. But when it comes to judgments with normatively evaluable content, *objectivity* becomes a challenge for us, something to be pursued in the 'space of reasons'.[24] Then, if we slide toward the other extreme – strong objectivity and realism (e.g., metaphysical realism in Putnam's sense, as briefly sketched above) – *recognition may become too difficult*: we would presumably first have to settle whether religious beliefs can be mind-independently true or false, before being able to decide whether a person or a group is able to be 'objective' in this area, and to thereby recognize them as rational thinkers. These are in the end questions about the possibility of recognizing others as inquirers, as inhabitants of the space of reasons. But how objective do we have to be *qua* inquirers? Recognizing ourselves as responsible to others in our inquiries can be argued to be a matter of recognizing our own fallibility and dependence on our membership in a community of inquirers.[25]

In the semantically oriented realism debate in particular (as developed by Putnam as well as Michael Dummett), *recognition-transcendent* truths have played a major role: to be a realist is to accept that (possibly) recognition-transcendent statements (e.g., 'There are no intelligent extraterrestrials') are mind-independently determinately objectively true or false, in principle just like statements whose truth-values it is easy to recognize (e.g., 'There is a cup of coffee on the table'); to be an antirealist is to deny this.[26] Call this form of recognition-transcendence RT1. One could also invoke recognition-transcendence in another sense: if someone is 'beyond recognition' in the sense that s/he cannot be recognized as

[24] For an influential contemporary employment of the notion of the space of reasons, which we owe to Wilfrid Sellars, see John McDowell, *Mind and World*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1996; 1st ed. 1994).

[25] Cf., e.g., Kenneth R. Westphal, 'Rational Justification and Mutual Recognition in Substantive Domains', *Dialogue*, 52 (2013), 1-40. According to Westphal, this is a transcendental condition for the possibility of rational judgment. (Hence, this argument leads to a form of Kantian pragmatism.)

[26] The kind of (arguably antirealistic) epistemic concept of truth associated with Putnam's internal-realist-phase theory of truth as idealized rational acceptability, or epistemic justification in ideal conditions, in a way denies (at least strong) recognition-transcendence. As is clear in his later writings, Putnam has come to reject such an epistemic theory of truth altogether. See Hilary Putnam, *Philosophy in an Age of Science*, eds. Mario de Caro and David Macarthur (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2012); in this new volume, he avoids connecting these issues with religion and theology, though.

something or someone in particular, under some normative description (e.g., as an inquirer, or perhaps more specifically as an inquirer into recognition-transcendent truths), we may regard this as another kind of recognition-transcendence. Call this RT2.

Now, can we recognize (in the sense of RT2) someone as a recognizer (or non-recognizer) of (some or all) potential recognition-transcendent truths (in the sense of RT1)? Or should we recognize (RT2) each other as potential recognizers (RT1) of there being recognition-transcendent truths (RT1)? There is, then, a certain kind of iterability and variability of RT1 and RT2, yielding a potentially indefinite complexity of relations of recognition and recognition-transcendence.

What does this result teach us? Perhaps it only shows that metaphysical issues concerning RT1 need the ethically relevant perspective of RT2 – a perspective and a notion of recognition directed at other human beings instead of either mere truths (or facts) or mere principles of rationality or other norms. This also necessarily includes recognizing our own fallibility and dependence on other inquirers.[27]

Moreover, a point worth emphasizing here is that religious truths, if there are any, might be (humanly) recognition-transcendent. A reasonable form of religious realism, or theological realism (as well as, by extension, a reasonable form of realism regarding religious studies), needs to account for this idea. Even more strongly, *whether* there are any religious truths may be recognition-transcendent. It may, arguably, be a feature of our religious practices and their theological interpretations and articulations that these limits of human recognition abilities need to be recognized by those (successfully) engaging in such practices or seeking to theologically articulate and understand them (or at least by anyone who could be recognized as successfully doing so). At least, at the meta-level, it needs to be recognized that it might be recognition-transcendent whether religious truths (if there are any) are recognition-transcendent or not. There are, as can easily be seen, several versions of recognition and recognition-transcendence at work here; a more detailed theory of this matter would have to sort out their relations much more comprehensively. Any such theory, if adequate, will also need to deal with the key distinction between recognizing people and recognizing something else – truths, principles, criteria, norms, etc. – which in this

[27] Cf. Westphal, 'Rational Justification and Mutual Recognition in Substantive Domains', cited above.

case amounts to the distinction between recognizing people as recognizers (or non-recognizers) or truths and/or their recognition-transcendence, on the one hand, and recognizing recognition-transcendence itself, or there being recognition-transcendent truths.

CONCLUSION

There are, we may conclude, pragmatist resources still not in full use in the general realism debate (and in its various localizations and contextualizations, for example, in the philosophy of science and in the discussions of social ontology), as well as in the specific debate(s) on realism vs. antirealism regarding religion, theology, and religious studies. Pragmatism may be uniquely able to critically analyze the relations between these levels of the debate by contextualizing them in the underlying purposive practices and the needs or interests they serve (viz., religion, theology, scientific inquiry, philosophy itself). Pragmatism may, indeed, be the only perspective on the realism debate that can seriously make sense of the idea that 'mind-independence' itself is not just a realistic 'given' but a human practice-laden construct. The concept of recognition, moreover, can be employed to enrich the pragmatist approach to the realism issue. This is a further Kantian-inspired (and certainly not only Hegelian) development of pragmatism.

This final point about pragmatic realism being a fundamentally Kantian way of thinking, in philosophy of religion and elsewhere, needs to be taken seriously.[28] This even extends to the need to take seriously a pragmatic analogy of Kantian 'things in themselves' (or 'noumena') in this area. Putnam himself, who generally seeks to avoid strong metaphysical commitments, points out that he is 'not inclined to scoff at the idea of a noumenal ground behind the dualities of experience, even if all attempts to talk about it lead to antinomies'; furthermore, he adds that because 'one cannot talk about the transcendent or even deny its existence without paradox, one's attitude to it must, perhaps, be the concern of religion rather than rational philosophy'.[29] In some later writings, too, Putnam (arguing against, say, what he regards as

[28] I have tried to argue for the entanglement of pragmatism with Kantian transcendental thinking in several previous works, including most recently in Pihlström, *Pragmatic Pluralism and the Problem of God*, especially chapter 1.

[29] Hilary Putnam, *Realism and Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 226.

pseudo-Wittgensteinian relativistic 'language-game theology') seems to maintain that a realistic attitude to what religious perspectives are perspectives on is a presupposition of making sense of religious and theological language-use: 'A perspective on something cannot simply be "constructed"; if it is to be a perspective at all, it must be constrained by *what* it depicts [...].'[30]

Insofar as such a realistic postulation of a transcendent reality of religion cannot really be spoken about in any normal language, pragmatic realism cannot be committed to any strong epistemological realism (or even semantic realism) about the transcendent. It can only incorporate a minimal assumption of ontological realism regarding transcendence, along with a fallibilist recognition of the possible recognition-transcendence of any truths (or falsities) about it. There is something out there that we may have to postulate insofar as our religious attitudes are to have any sense in our practices (or to be sensibly denied), but we need to recognize that such postulations could always be completely mistaken. It is in terms of pragmatism itself that this kind of theological, religious, and philosophical attitudes and their presuppositions are to be critically evaluated.

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[30] Hilary Putnam, 'On Negative Theology', *Faith and Philosophy*, 14 (1997), 407-422.

INTERNAL REALISM AND THE REALITY OF GOD

HANS-PETER GROSSHANS

University of Münster

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]

[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]

[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' ('Ausdruckphänomene 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, RGG⁴, 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

[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

[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.

METAPHOR AND THEOLOGICAL REALISM

SEBASTIAN GÄB

University of Trier

Abstract. In this paper, I argue that there are indispensable and irreducible metaphors in religious language and that this does not threaten a realist interpretation of religion. I first sketch a realist theory of religious language and argue that we cannot avoid addressing the problems metaphor poses to semantics. I then give a brief account of what it means for a metaphorical sentence to be true and how metaphors can refer to something even if what they mean is not expressible in literal terms. Finally, I discuss how this realist theory of metaphor influences our understanding of negative theology and gives a new perspective on religious pluralism.

I. THEOLOGICAL REALISM

What is theological realism? According to a first, naïve understanding it is the view that what religious beliefs are about is real, i.e., that it exists independently of us. But what does it mean to say that religious objects are real? My approach is to treat this as a semantic question, as a question about the meaning of religious language. Theological realism in this sense is a theory of religious language, or, more precisely, a theory of meaning for a certain class of statements rather than for the objects of these statements. Without going into the details I would suggest to characterize a realist understanding of religious language through four aspects: truth-conditionality, strict valence, evidence-transcendence and reference. So if someone holds a realist view of religious language, he will maintain that religious sentences have truth-conditions, which determine their propositional content; he will also interpret these truth-conditions as conditions of realist truth, which means that every

sentence is strictly valent (it has a definite truth-value, even if we are unable to determine it; there are no truth-value-gaps) and that its truth is evidence-transcendent (the sentence is true or not independently of our actual or potential knowledge). What do I mean by that? Let's take the following sentence as an example:

'Christ has risen from the dead.'

A theological realist will understand this sentence in a way that implies the following:

(a) 'Christ has risen from the dead' is true if and only if Christ has risen from the dead. This also implies that 'Christ has risen from the dead' means exactly and only that Christ has risen from the dead, and not that it is good to live one's life from the perspective of eternity or that we should act charitably against each other.
(b) The sentence is definitely true or not true; either Christ has risen, or not.
(c) The truth of the sentence does not depend on our language, our conceptual scheme, our cognitive powers or other. Whether Christ has risen or not is a question only of facts, not of the conditions of our perceiving these facts.
(d) The sentence's truth-condition is a function of its semantic values, i.e., the sentence is true if and only if the general term 'risen from the dead' applies to the person to which the singular term 'Christ' refers.

Semantically speaking, this theory is unproblematic; there may be some quarrels about the correct interpretation of the central religious terms that appear in the sentence, e.g. what does 'rise' mean, or whom exactly does the term 'Christ' refer to? But these are not issues in philosophy of language; these problems are theological, not semantical. The approach will not become problematic until we apply it to religious language, especially to its metaphoric dimension, and in this paper I will try to explain why there is a problem and how we might solve it. First, I will show why it is impossible to avoid the problems that metaphor poses to theological realism and which particular challenge lies in it. Then, I will try to sketch a solution to these problems and finally I will point out some of the consequences which will result for some debates in philosophy of religion. I am going to argue for two points: first, that religious language has irreducibly metaphorical elements, and second that this is not a problem for theological realism.

II. THEOLOGICAL REALISM AND THE PROBLEM OF METAPHOR

Religious language is rich with metaphors, symbols and other forms of figurative language, not only in its poetical dimension, in hymns, prayers or songs, but also in its philosophical or theological dimension, since a lot of important religious concepts are designated by metaphorical expressions.[1] The term 'heaven', for example, is clearly a metaphorical concept, even if it is not immediately recognized as one today, and also speaking of Jesus as the 'son' of God is a metaphor. Further examples are notions like '*nirvana*' in Buddhism, which literally means extinguishing, or '*dao*' in traditional Chinese religion (literally: way), both trying to capture something that cannot be said in literal language. Metaphors are ubiquitous in religious language. But they are also in a way indispensable, since the special nature of religious objects often impedes alternative ways of speaking. The language of physics also relies on metaphors for qualitative statements, but these metaphors can without loss be replaced by mathematical expressions; in contrast, religious metaphors in most cases cannot be reduced to non-figurative language without losing their religious character. Take our talk of light-waves as an example: surely this is a metaphor drawing on the waves of the sea, which covers some essential differences (e.g. that there is no medium), but which can without loss be translated into a mathematical description of frequency, amplitude and wavelength. But if we try to give non-metaphorical alternatives to religious metaphors like 'heaven', we will find ourselves at a loss. We could find other metaphors like 'paradise' or 'afterlife', but

[1] I here understand metaphor in a very simple way as a kind of speech in which we are talking about object X in a way that is usually used to talk about object Y (cf. Soskice 1985: 15). There are other possible definitions, but for our current purpose the details of defining metaphor are less important. We might note in passing though that this definition allows us to draw a clear distinction between metaphor and symbol, since metaphor is a linguistic device, while symbol is not. There may be a certain mental process underlying both metaphor and symbol (a process of seeing-as), but both are different instantiations of this process. In fact, it is this element of seeing-as in metaphor which will be most important, while the details of defining metaphor are secondary. This also is the reason why I will not say anything on the difference between metaphor and simile: A simile is essentially based on metaphor, since it necessarily involves the metaphorical element of seeing-as. Everything is like everything in some way, so the point of a simile is to see one thing in terms of another. But that is just what metaphor does. If e.g. Christ says 'The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed', the point is not to make us notice some trivial similarity between these two things, but to see the kingdom of heaven *as* a seed of mustard. He could as well have said 'The kingdom of heaven is a grain of mustard seed' and nothing would have changed.

this will only defer the problem; or we could create non-metaphorical paraphrases like 'the state of bliss in communion with God after death', but the more these paraphrases will be precise, the less religious they will be.[2] So if we cannot avoid religious metaphors, a realist theory of religious language should be able to explain their meaning.

Now there are basically three objections against the thesis that there should be a realist theory of metaphor:

(a) That metaphors don't have meaning.
(b) That, even if they have meaning, this meaning is fundamentally different from literal meaning.
(c) That, even if metaphorical meaning is essentially the same as literal meaning, metaphorical meaning is superfluous, since any metaphor can be reduced to literal language by paraphrasing it.

Against these objections I contend that metaphors are *cognitive*, *semantic* and *irreducible*. Let me briefly sketch my reasons for that.

(a) The idea that metaphors don't have meaning in a semantic sense is mainly propounded by Davidson. According to him, the only meaning a metaphor has is its literal meaning and therefore metaphors are in most cases simply false.[3] The illusion of cognitive content is generated by pragmatics: a metaphor does not say something, but it affects us causally (it makes us notice some similarity), and these effects are usually confused with its meaning. So if I say that God is our father, according to Davidson this means just what it literally means: that God is our father, which is plainly false, since God is not my father; my father is my father. What the utterance does is make me notice something about God, just as pointing and saying 'Look!' would do. But *prima facie* there are some important reasons to reject this view. First, the truth-value of a statement alternates depending on whether we understand it metaphorically or not. If I say about some surgeon 'he's a butcher', this can be true when used metaphorically, and yet be false when used literally. But if two identical sentences uttered under the same circumstances have different truth-values, their meanings must be different, which presupposes that they had meaning in the first place.[4] Second, we usually treat metaphors as bearers

[2] And even with regard to this paraphrase we should be cautious: is 'communion with God' really not a metaphor? At least this kind of communion is quite different from communion with other human beings.

[3] Davidson 1978.

[4] Cf. Kittay 1987: 103; Moran 2001: 251.

of truth-value and meaning.[5] We can for example draw conclusions from them ('if he is a block of ice, we need not appeal to his pity') or gain knowledge (if for example someone teaches me that categories are tools) – how could this be possible if metaphors have no cognitive content? And third, how could we explain the effects of metaphor, if not through their meaning? To which fact about God is the metaphor in the previous example 'God is our father' drawing my attention, if not to the fact that God metaphorically speaking *is* my father? The fact can only be identified through the metaphor's meaning. If on the other hand we assume that metaphors don't have meaning, there is no criterion to decide which reaction to a metaphor is appropriate and which is not – we could never misunderstand a metaphor.[6] If someone were to understand the words from the sermon on the hill 'You are the light of the world' as 'You hurt my eyes and cause skin cancer', we could not say that he did not get the metaphor, but only that it affects him differently from others. So intuitively, metaphors do have cognitive content, and in the absence of strong objections against this default position, we should stick to it.

(b) It is sometimes argued that metaphorical meaning is essentially different from literal meaning, so that metaphor is a distinct form of language for which we have to develop a special theory of meaning. But this argument is based on the dubious assumption that a clear and substantial distinction can be drawn between literal and metaphorical language, between what an expression actually means and what only figuratively. But this picture is misguiding; rather, these two are like the two ends of one and the same spectrum. This can be seen from the fact that no utterance contains within itself a criterion to decide whether or not it is meant metaphorically. A sentence like 'Tom is a gorilla' is, without any context, neither metaphorical nor literal. If it is uttered while someone is explaining to me the different monkeys in the zoo, a literal interpretation is suggested; if it is used to talk about someone's boss, it is probably used metaphorically. Not until the context is specified can we decide which sentence is metaphorical and which is not.[7] But if literal and metaphorical meaning are both context-dependent, then literal meaning is not the standard-case and metaphor the deviation.

[5] Lycan 2000: 212.

[6] Ibid.

[7] This point is defended extensively in Searle 1978. Also cf. Hesse (1988: 3): 'Literal use is most frequent use in familiar contexts.'

It doesn't then make sense to assume a literal meaning as standard, and the distinction between literal and metaphorical loses its point.[8] We don't need two theories, since there are not two phenomena.

(c) The final objection is that there is no special meaning of metaphor, since any supposed metaphorical meaning can be reduced to the meaning of a literal paraphrase. 'Paraphrase' in this sense is to be understood as: an expression whose meaning is exactly the same as the metaphor's, not just an approximation. Paraphrases in this sense are like translations: they have the same truth-condition. Of course, there may be some simple or dead metaphors which are paraphrasable in this sense, but interesting metaphors usually are not. One reason for this is that a metaphor's paraphrase will itself often be metaphorical. I could, for example, talk about a sharp wind and explain that this means that the wind cuts like a knife.[9] But of course, the wind does not really cut like a knife, but only figuratively. The paraphrase is itself a metaphor. And if I go one step further and say that the wind feels like it would cut me with a knife, my utterance still remains metaphorical. My association of wind and cutting is metaphorical; feeling the wind in this way just means seeing the wind metaphorically as a knife. This phenomenon is rooted in a central property of metaphor, namely, its essential openness in meaning. A good metaphor opens a potentially infinite space of meaning, which a paraphrase does not.[10] If I say metaphorically that Christ is a good shepherd, we may understand this as meaning that he protects us and watches over us, that he takes care for us. But a different understanding is possible: the believers are sheep, they are dumb and need guidance, and even the best shepherd will in the end milk or shear or butcher his cattle. Paraphrases usually lack this openness of metaphor, which is why they can never completely replace them.

So the theological realist must concern himself with the semantics of metaphor. But where is the challenge? Theological realism is a theory of religious language and as I just tried to argue, it is a theory of all religious language, even if it is metaphorical. So metaphorical utterances in religious language must be truth-apt, have truth-conditions and their truth-conditions are to be determined by the semantic values of their

[8] That does not mean that the whole concept of literalness is superfluous. 'Literal' can be understood as a limit-concept, denoting meaning in a default context. Deviations from this default context call for figurative readings.

[9] This example is borrowed from Hesse 1988: 4.

[10] Cavell 1976: 79.

components. Yet we are not allowed to derive these truth-conditions from literal paraphrases; the metaphorical utterance in itself must be true or false and refer to something. But under which conditions is a sentence like 'You are the salt of the earth' true and to what does a term like 'Last Judgement' refer? These questions – how can we determine the truth-conditions of religious metaphors and how can we refer to something by them? – must be answered, if theological realism is supposed to be a viable theory.

III. TRUTH AND MEANING OF A METAPHOR

When speaking of the truth of metaphorical sentences we must be cautious not to misunderstand the term 'truth' in this context: there is no such thing as metaphorical truth, if by that we mean a special kind of truth that only metaphors have. Metaphorical sentences are not true in another way than literal sentences. Metaphors are a figure of speech, not of truth. Thus, it makes no sense to maintain that a sentence is only metaphorically true, since what decides whether or not a sentence is true are the facts and not the phrasing. So if I say 'Your room is a pigsty', this sentence will be true or false depending on the state of the room, on whether what is said agrees with the facts. But the truth of this sentence is not different from the truth of the literal sentence 'Your room is filthy and untidy'. So asking about the truth of metaphor does not mean asking about a special kind of truth, but rather asking how a metaphor's meaning and its truth-condition are constituted. Which proposition does it express and how do metaphorical propositions correspond to reality?

Now the theological realist claims that religious language, even if it is metaphorical, must be understood through truth-conditional semantics. This means that it should be possible for us to state the truth-conditions of a metaphorical sentence. But this seems to be a problem, for as I have said earlier, metaphors are essentially open in their meaning; if they have no definite, univocal meaning, then how can there be a meaning at all? After all, a predication draws a line between all things in the world to which the term applies and those to which it does not. But if metaphors cannot draw a clear line, they seem to be unable to predicate anything at all. But then again, I pointed out earlier that metaphorical utterances intuitively do have truth-conditions, since they can be true or false. But then what is the sentence's truth-condition?

Let's take another example: in *The Tempest*, Prospero says:

> We are of such stuff | As dreams are made on.[11]

If we assume that this sentence, like any other, expresses a proposition, then the disquotation schema should hold for it:

> 'We are of such stuff | As dreams are made on' is true if and only if we are of such stuff as dreams are made on.

Unfortunately, this schema is not very instructive, since objectlanguage and metalanguage are the same and since, which is more important, we have no other expression in the metalanguage which could be substituted for the metaphor. If my previous arguments are sound, the metaphor can neither be replaced nor paraphrased by a literal expression; so the only way to fully state the cognitive content of the metaphorical sentence is to use the same metaphor again. Thus, in a way the propositional content of the sentence is ineffable, or at least can only be expressed in one single, not absolutely precise way.[12] It could be described, adumbrated, sketched, but not explicitly *said* other than metaphorically. But how can something which cannot clearly be said, express a proposition?

First of all we should note that it obviously does. We usually don't regard utterances as devoid of meaning just because there is no way to explicate their content other than repeating them. Even for simple, literal statements like 'The apple is red', we have no way to state their cognitive content, but this does not block us from treating them as meaningful.[13] So it may be difficult or even impossible to state the propositional content of a metaphor in other words, but this alone is no objection against the existence of any such content. This should not surprise us: there is a remarkable parallel between metaphor and ostensive language. For example, I could say about someone that his voice sounds like Frank Sinatra's; or about some fruit, which someone does not know, that it tastes like lemons. In both cases, there is no other way to state the truth-condition of the sentence than to repeat the sentence. I cannot say *how* the voice sounds or *how* the fruit tastes by listing their various qualities; I cannot say (with words) what makes someone's voice sound like Frank Sinatra's. Nevertheless we would not dispute the fact that this sentence

[11] The Tempest, Act 4, Scene 1.

[12] To be sure, it is only ineffable in *our* language. As Henle (1949) nicely demonstrates, ineffability is a relational predicate: something is ineffable in some language, which means that it could well be expressible in other languages.

[13] Goodman 1979: 126.

expresses a proposition and that it without a doubt has cognitive content, since it can be true or false, depending on what the voice really sounds like. If we accept that there are facts about this voice and truth-conditions of my statement about it, we must also accept that there are propositions, too, which are expressed by the sentence in question.

Thus, it is also no objection against metaphorical propositions to postulate (as John Searle does) a principle of expressibility, according to which every meaning in a given language can be expressed exactly.[14] That is without a doubt true, but gives us no reason to assume that metaphors have no meaning. This would only follow if we confuse 'exactly' with 'literally', for a metaphor does express its meaning as exactly as any other sentence, although there may be no literal way to state the same content. All that follows from the principle of expressibility is the trivial fact that if metaphors have meaning then it must be possible to express this meaning; but it does not follow that there must be *another* way of expressing this meaning. It is conceivable and consonant with the principle that a metaphor is the only possible way to exactly express some meaning.

The basic assumption behind the idea that a metaphorical sentence could only have cognitive content if this cognitive content can somehow be said, is that propositions are purely linguistic phenomena. Only given this premise does it follow from a lack of a literal paraphrase that a metaphorical sentence has no propositional content. But if we regard propositions as essentially non-linguistic entities, which are only captured by language, then it is possible that there are propositions which defy this linguistic capturing.[15] So a metaphorical sentence's truth-condition simply is the proposition expressed; this proposition indeed can often only be expressed metaphorically, but that does not prevent it from being a proposition.

IV. METAPHOR AND REFERENCE

This leads us directly to our next question: how is it possible to grasp the proposition expressed in a metaphorical sentence? Usually, we

[14] Searle 1981: 114. For problems with different interpretations of 'exactly' see Binkley 1979.

[15] Incidentally, this suggests that there could be a sound argument from the cognitivity of metaphor to the ontological reality of propositions, but spelling it out here would lead too far.

understand the truth-condition and thereby the meaning of a sentence through the semantic values of the terms occurring in it: a simple sentence with the structure F(a) is true if and only if the general term 'F' applies to the object, to which the term 'a' refers. 'The lemon is sour' is true if and only if the concept 'sour' applies to the object the term 'lemon' refers to. Thus, the concept of reference is essential for grasping truth-conditions, and accordingly realist semantics demand that the concept of truth be founded on the concept of reference. But how do we determine the reference of a term? The traditional view developed by Frege is summarized under the slogan 'sense determines reference'. According to this position, the reference of a term is defined by the set of descriptions that determine its sense. So the term 'God' for example has roughly the sense: omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good, eternal being that created the world, and refers to the being having these properties. But this model presupposes something we explicitly ruled out for metaphorical sentences: the possibility of paraphrase. If we wanted to state the semantic value of the expression 'such stuff as dreams are made on' from the above example in this way, we would have to give a literal paraphrase of the metaphorical sense. But this has already turned out to be impossible, since the sense is in a way ineffable. But if the sense of the sentence is ineffable, how do I know what the expression refers to? Here, it is useful to recall the debate on reference, especially the contributions of Kripke and Putnam, and to take a look at cases which seem to conflict with the traditional view. For example, I may talk to someone about Columbus, and we both believe that Columbus is the person who discovered America and first sailed around the Earth. Both are false, but even if we have no correct description of Columbus, we can nevertheless refer to him. The term's reference is not defined by the object's supposed properties, but fixed independently from them and passed on among the speakers of the language. This theory of reference is known as direct or causal theory and maintains that when we first encounter some object, e.g. water, we baptize this substance as 'water' and create a rigid connection between term and object. On this view, the specific properties of water (e.g. being H_2O) are not important, and neither need we know them nor be correct about them – 'water' would still refer to water.

Now in the same way, we can explain how a metaphor can have reference while its sense is still ineffable. Just as some experiential context is relevant for fixing the reference of the term 'water' and not

a set of descriptions, the metaphor's reference can be traced back to some experience, too. These are parallel cases: if I say about someone that his voice sounds like Frank Sinatra's, the semantic value of the expression 'like Frank Sinatra's' is determined by perceiving the sound of that voice and nothing else. And if I say that Christ is the light of the world, this, too, is rooted in a certain experience, although it will be more complicated to give an account of this experience (maybe I am experiencing the salvific power of Christ in my life). Also, this experience need not be my own – the metaphor may be coined by someone else and then be passed on to me without me fully understanding its sense. As a consequence, this causal theory of reference stresses the importance of religious experience for understanding religious language.[16] Religious experience is the primary phenomenon when it comes to fixing meanings, while definite descriptions are secondary. Only if we take religious experiences as a starting point for understanding religious language are we able to explain how we can understand metaphors in religion.

It is important to note two minor points here: first, the metaphor will, in contrast to pure names like 'water', have some connection to the relevant experience via its linguistic shape. While the phonetic sequence 'water' could in principle represent any object at all, I can only speak of God as a mighty fortress if there is some relation between my experience and the sense of the metaphor, that is, if I perceive God's strength, protection or security (and not His compassion). Second, the metaphor's reference is *not* my experience itself, and also not the feeling that accompanies my experience, but God's property of being a mighty fortress (metaphorically), which is identified through my experience.

V. CONSEQUENCES: NEGATIVE THEOLOGY AND PLURALISM

If we take together the two theses, that metaphors are irreducible in religious language and that their meaning is based on certain experiences, some interesting consequences follow for other areas in philosophy of religion. The first is negative theology, the second pluralism of religions.

(1) Negative theology maintains that we cannot predicate something positive about God; we can only say what God is not. There is a remarkable parallel to metaphor: just as metaphors cannot be reduced

[16] It also implies that one of the pragmatic functions of religious language is to provide a means to trigger certain religious experiences in one's audience.

or paraphrased, talk about God cannot be translated into affirmative, positive language. But as we have seen, this quality of metaphor is no reason to deny it a cognitive content and we could postulate the same for negative theology. Even if we can neither say that God is eternal nor that he is not eternal, this is no reason to conclude that negative theology is non-cognitive, unless we make the critical assumption that a proposition is only expressed where it can be expressed in a literal, unambiguous way. If we don't accept this assumption, it becomes possible to see the negative way as a method to grasp propositions about God, without being able to clearly express them in language. And this means that there may be facts and truths beyond our linguistic possibilities. This is not a problem for realism: realism only demands that there can be no truth-value gaps and that truth is not tied to our epistemic capacities, and negative theology fulfils both. So negative theology is actually a position of extreme realism, contrary to several contemporary interpretations, which regard it as a variety of antirealism. Negative theology predicates true propositions of a reality which by their very nature cannot be expressed in another way.[17] So in other words, the consequence for theological realism is that it only postulates the existence of objective truths about religious entities, but not that we necessarily have linguistic access to them (or any access at all).[18]

(2) Seeing direct reference and therefore religious experience as the core phenomena in the foundation of religious language opens up a new approach to the problem of religious pluralism. The fundamental problem of pluralism is to explain how the conflicting truth-claims of different religions can be reconciled. These truth-claims are based on the meaning of the respective theological statements, of course: what is claimed to be true when someone says that 'God created the world', can only be determined if we know the meaning of the relevant components and the sentence itself. But if the meaning of these terms is not, as a description theory of reference maintains, defined by a list of the object's properties, but rather by a certain experience, a lot of supposed contradictions just vanish. Take as an example the question of whether

[17] Presumably, what negative theology says is rooted in some kind of mystical experience, too. But finding the contents of these experiences in theological language and incorporating them into the language of negative theology would lead too far here.

[18] It also follows from this that the quite popular contention that realism demands a literal interpretation of religious language (e.g. in Kaufman and Cupitt) is false. Realism demands a certain concept of truth and meaning, but not a certain kind of expression.

there is a God: Christianity gives an affirmative answer, Buddhism denies it, which creates the contradiction that pluralism wants to bridge. But this contradiction results from our understanding of the term 'God' as 'omnipotent, omniscient, eternal being, etc.'. Now if we don't understand this term descriptively, but rather metaphorically as something which is given to me in a certain kind of experience, whatever it may be, a way is found to avoid the contradiction. We should not ask how these two sentences can be logically compatible, but whether the religious experiences which the Buddhist calls 'emptiness' (*shunyata*) and those which the Christian calls 'God' differ in their experiential qualities. If it could be shown that there is a common core of experience behind the different descriptions, which defines the reference of these two terms, the pluralist could maintain to have found something these entities essentially have in common and thereby overcome the superficial gap between them.[19] To be sure, this would involve a massive revision of all those religious beliefs which then have to be taken metaphorically, and few believers will be happy to accept this requirement. But if we want to make sense of pluralism, I believe the only way is to adopt a metaphorical-realist interpretation of religious language.

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[19] It is without a doubt true that on this theory we could never be sure whether the religious experiences of two different people really do have the same common core, since there is nothing to compare them to. But strictly speaking, this holds for all other experiences as well. If you and I are looking at a painting together, I can never be sure whether you are seeing the same as me, whether we are having the same experience. We could agree on the *object* of our experience, but not on the way this object is given to us (the *erlebnis*). So if this is reason to doubt the truthfulness of religious experience, it is a reason to distrust all experience.

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WITTGENSTEIN AND THE 'FACTORIZATION MODEL' OF RELIGIOUS BELIEF

GENIA SCHÖNBAUMSFELD

University of Southampton

Abstract. In the contemporary literature Wittgenstein has variously been labelled a fideist, a non-cognitivist and a relativist of sorts. The underlying motivation for these attributions seems to be the thought that the content of a belief can clearly be separated from the attitude taken towards it. Such a 'factorization model' which construes religious beliefs as consisting of two independent 'factors' – the belief's content and the belief-attitude – appears to be behind the idea that one could, for example, have the religious attitude alone (fideism, non-cognitivism) or that religious content will remain broadly unaffected by a fundamental change in attitude (Kusch). In this article I will argue that such a 'factorization model' severely distorts Wittgenstein's conception of religious belief.

I.

The myths surrounding Wittgenstein's conception of religious belief are tenacious and enduring. In the contemporary literature, for example, Wittgenstein has variously been labelled a fideist (Nielsen 2005), a non-cognitivist (Hyman 2001, Schröder 2007) and a relativist of sorts (Kusch 2011). The underlying motivation for many of these attributions seems to be the thought that the content of a belief can clearly be separated from the attitude taken towards it. Such a 'factorization model' which construes religious beliefs as consisting of two independent 'factors' – the belief's content and the belief-attitude – appears to be behind the idea that one could, for example, have the religious attitude alone (fideism, non-cognitivism) or that religious content will remain broadly unaffected by a fundamental change in attitude (Kusch). In the present contribution

I will argue that such a model faces insuperable philosophical and exegetical difficulties, and, consequently, that the conceptions that spring from it are mistaken.

II.

Wittgenstein's conception of religious belief in many ways mirrors his philosophical concerns more generally. Just as Wittgenstein rejects the idea that philosophy is a theoretical exercise whose purpose consists in developing explanatory hypotheses about the hidden workings of language and the world, so, too, he jettisons the thought that Christianity offers us a philosophical theory about what goes on in a celestial realm. Instead, he shares Kierkegaard's insight that truth 'in the sense in which Christ is the truth is not a sum of statements, not a definition etc., but a life' (Kierkegaard 1991: 205).

One does not, Wittgenstein believes, come to Christianity through argument and intellectual deliberation; it is rather the shape of one's life and experiences that will (or will not) teach one a use for the Christian concepts. The exigencies of life may, as it were, thrust these concepts upon one. It is for this reason that Wittgenstein says:

> It strikes me that a religious belief could only be something like a passionate commitment to a system of reference. Hence, although it's *belief*, it's really a way of living, or a way of assessing life. It's passionately seizing hold of *this* interpretation (1977: 64e).

This passage has been subjected to an enormous amount of misinterpretation. So, for example, Wittgenstein is often berated, by believers and unbelievers alike, that by emphasizing faith's 'existential' dimension – that is to say, its embeddedness in religious *practice* – Wittgenstein has thrown out the baby with the bathwater: once all the philosophy that is written about Christianity is put aside,[1] one would seem to be left with nothing more than adherence to a 'doctrineless' form of life. As Kai Nielsen (2005: 116), for instance, says: 'The most crucial error common to both Nietzsche and Wittgenstein is to argue that Christian practice is everything and Christian belief, belief that involves doctrines, is nothing.'[2]

[1] Wittgenstein once wrote: 'If Christianity is the truth then all the philosophy that is written about it is false' (1977: 83e).

[2] Compare also John Hyman (2001) and Severin Schroeder (2007).

John Hyman takes a similar view. He glosses Wittgenstein's remark in the following way: 'If a religious belief is something like a passionate commitment to a system of reference – as opposed to a passionate commitment to the truth of an empirical proposition – then a religious belief cannot be *true* or *false*. And Wittgenstein held that religious beliefs cannot be *reasonable* or *unreasonable* either, if that means that they can or cannot be justified' (2001: 6).[3]

But the matter may be much more complicated than these criticisms would suggest. I have previously argued, for example, that, as in his philosophical practice more generally, the point of Wittgenstein's remarks is to challenge the very terms in which the debate is cast. In other words, Wittgenstein wants to show that it is itself an illusion to suppose that we are confronted by two exhaustive alternatives here: either adherence to a set of metaphysical beliefs (with certain ways of acting following from these beliefs) or passionate commitment to a way of life; there is no third way.

The thought that there cannot be any middle ground here is fuelled by the fact that we are naturally prone to suppose that it is possible neatly to separate the meaning of words from their use, and so we might be tempted to believe, as many commentators do, that it is possible to inspect the words alone in order to find out whether they make sense or not. John Cottingham (2009: 209) picturesquely calls such an approach applying the 'fruit juicer' method to modes of thought of which one is sceptical: to require 'the clear liquid of a few propositions to be extracted for examination in isolation from what [one] take[s] to be the irrelevant pulpy mush of context'. It is this tendency, Cottingham argues, that Wittgenstein's emphasis on praxis – in both religious and other contexts – is supposed to preclude.

Stephen Mulhall, who criticizes Hyman's paper in his (2001), would concur, arguing that Wittgenstein's whole approach consists of showing that 'no one can so much as understand what a belief in God's existence amounts to without grasping the location of that concept in the grammatical network of religious concepts that Wittgenstein here describes as a system of reference' (Mulhall 2001: 101). If this is correct, then it makes no sense to think, as Hyman does, that one can first establish the truth of the proposition that God exists and then use it as a reason for adopting the system of reference. Rather, one could not acquire a belief

[3] Compare also Severin Schroeder (2007).

in God's existence 'without both understanding and committing oneself to the broader grammatical system in which the concept of God has its life' (ibid.).

Martin Kusch has recently followed Nielsen in arguing that this kind of conception renders religious language incommensurable[4] with ordinary discourse: '[On this account] Wittgenstein is unable to pick out the propositional contents of religious beliefs since he cannot translate religious language into his own ... the languages of the believer and the non-believer are, in important respects, incommensurable' (Kusch 2011: 38). Kusch attributes this view to Cyril Barrett and myself:

> Barrett and Schönbaumsfeld hold that for Wittgenstein religious language involves a 'reorientation' of ordinary language. Moreover, they imply that the non-believer can come to grasp the meaning of religious language only by converting. And they suggest that the non-believer suffers from a kind of conceptual aspect-blindness (Kusch 2011: 39).

In spite of this, Kusch is aware that I do not wish to attribute the incommensurability thesis to Wittgenstein. Quoting from my (2007: 193):

> Religious discourse cannot ... be 'self-contained' or 'sealed-off' from other linguistic 'domains', for it is precisely the quotidian senses of words that make possible the 'renewed' uses of applications of these words in religious contexts. In this respect, religious discourse, like artistic language-use, involves an *extension* or *transformation* of everyday discourse and consequently can't be 'incommensurable' with it.

Nevertheless, Kusch (2011: 40) claims to be unconvinced by this response for the following reasons. Firstly, he thinks that the fact that religious discourse 'renews' ordinary words does not establish that this discourse is translatable into those words. Secondly, Kusch contends that if God's intervention is needed to give the religious believer 'almost new words', then what – short of a conversion – can enable the non-believer to understand these words? Finally, Kusch believes that the parallel that I draw between artistic and religious language-use cannot demonstrate commensurability, since grasping religious discourse for the first time seems to amount to a fundamental change in form of life, while understanding an artistic metaphor does not. In the next sections, I will respond to Kusch's critique of my conception and raise some worries for his alternative view.

[4] In my (2007) I show that Nielsen's objection misfires (see pp. 191-6).

III.

I argued previously that in order to grasp the sense of religious expressions, one not only needs to understand what the 'atoms'– that is, the individual words comprising the utterance – mean in *other* contexts (in contexts, say, in which one has first learnt the uses of these words), but what the sentence as a whole means, and this can only be done if one understands how the words are functioning in *this* specific context; one must, as it were, understand their technique of application *here*. This is why Wittgenstein says in the *Lectures on Religious Belief* (1966: 55) that in one sense he understands all the religious person who believes in a Last Judgement says, because he understands, for example, the ordinary words 'God' or 'separate',[5] but that, in another sense, he doesn't understand the sentence *at all* for, in this particular context, he has no grasp of how these familiar words are used: 'my normal technique of language leaves me' (ibid.).

Does this imply, as Kusch (2011: 40) seems to believe, that religious language is therefore incommensurable with other forms of discourse? No. The reasons for this are as follows. One cannot, for example, explain what 'God's eye sees everything' means to someone who does not understand the habitual senses of the words comprising the sentence. Neither could one explain what 'eye' means in this context by pointing, say, to God's 'anatomy', since it is obvious that the word 'eye' in the sentence 'God's eye sees everything' is not functioning in the same way as the word 'eye' does in the sentence 'a racoon's eye can see in the dark'. It is equally obvious that one could not apply the word 'eye' to God, if one could not employ the word 'eye' in everyday contexts – if, that is, one could not understand 'a racoon's eye can see in the dark' and similar sentences. So, religious discourse cannot be radically discontinuous with ordinary language-use, since it is parasitic upon it.

Of course Kusch is right that it does not follow from the fact that there cannot be radical discontinuity here, that one is therefore able fully to translate religious discourse into another idiom. But I have never claimed that this is either possible or necessary. For, arguably, many linguistic domains are 'irreducible' (not incommensurable!) in this

[5] It is unclear why Wittgenstein speaks of 'separate' in connection with a discussion of a Last Judgement, but I presume he is thinking of sentences such as 'the soul is separate from the body' or some such thing, but of course this is only a guess. What exactly Wittgenstein meant is irrelevant to our discussion, though.

way – aesthetic, ethical and even psychological language-uses springing immediately to mind. Many unsuccessful philosophical attempts have been made to 'translate' these forms of discourse into another, primarily into a kind of 'language of science' perhaps.[6]

To be fair to Kusch, he claims to agree that learning about the grammar of religious expressions involves learning about the religious form of life. But it is not easy to see how that can be compatible with the 'factorization' model that he espouses.[7] For if the grammar of religious expressions can only be learnt from their context – that is to say, their embeddedness within the religious form of life – then one has to immerse oneself in that practice if one is to have any hope of understanding religious language. This does not imply, as Kusch mistakenly seems to assume, that one actually has to *convert* in order to be able to learn the grammar of religious expressions – for example, one does not have to be a religious believer to understand that the depth grammar of the concept 'God' is not akin to that of a super-empirical object (on Wittgenstein's view) – but it does mean that a lot of familiarity with and sensitivity to the practices in question is necessary.

Furthermore, there may well be *some* aspects of religious discourse that will continue to remain opaque to one, quite possibly regardless of whether one is a religious believer or not. As Wittgenstein says:

> In religion every level of devoutness must have its appropriate form of expression which has no sense at a lower level. This doctrine, which means something at a higher level, is null and void for someone who is still at the lower level; he *can* only understand it *wrongly* and so these words are *not* valid for such a person (1977: 32e).

In other words, the greater one's spiritual development, the more sense some religious doctrines might make. But, again, this does not radically distinguish religious from other forms of discourse, because it is also true in art, ethics and philosophy that the greater one's abilities and understanding, the greater the horizons of significance that will open themselves up to one. Indeed, when coming to see or to experience something for the first time, one often calls this having an 'epiphany' – something that seems very close to the conceptual 'reorientation' or transformation that I speak of in the religious domain. In fact, it seems

[6] One need only think of Mackie's view of ethics here or Churchland's attempt to reduce 'folk psychology' to the 'language' of neuroscience.

[7] For more on this, see the next section.

very close to how Wittgenstein thinks of his own philosophical activity, which he at one time describes as being like the shift from alchemy to chemistry.[8]

So, transitions are fluid here: the basic grammar of religious expressions can be learnt by believers and unbelievers alike by attending closely to the religious form of life and the use to which religious expressions are put in them. But *some* aspects of religious doctrine and practice may remain closed to one if one is not a religious believer. This should not be surprising. Actual participants in a practice always have a different perspective from outsiders to the practice – it is one thing to *learn about* driving a car, and quite another actually to drive it.

Wittgenstein seems to have this distinction in mind when he says that he could only utter the word 'Lord' with meaning, if he lived completely differently:

> I read: 'No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost.' – And it is true: I cannot call him *Lord*; because that says nothing to me. I could call him the 'paragon', 'God' even – or rather, I can understand it when he is called thus; but I cannot utter the word 'Lord' with meaning. *Because I do not believe* that he will come to judge me; because *that* says nothing to me. And it could say something to me, only if I lived *completely* differently (1977: 33e).

What Wittgenstein is saying here is that some religious expressions can be understood even if one doesn't share the perspective of the believer, while others will remain opaque or meaningless if one is not a participant in the religious form of life, and hence lives 'completely differently'. This already gives a fairly clear indication that Wittgenstein would reject a 'factorization' model of religious belief, for the significance of this passage precisely consists in bringing out that the meaning of religious contents is not independent of one's 'belief-attitude', which, in turn, cannot be specified independently of the way in which one lives one's life.

IV.

On Kusch's alternative conception, on the other hand, a distinction can be drawn between what he calls 'ordinary' and 'extraordinary' belief-attitudes that are directed towards the same propositional content:

[8] Quoted in Monk (1991: 298).

> Ordinary belief-attitudes are found in empirical and scientific beliefs; extraordinary belief-attitudes are characteristic of religious beliefs. [The *Lectures on Religious Belief* allow] that one and the same proposition – for instance, *that there will be a Last Judgement* – can serve as a propositional content for both an extraordinary and for an ordinary belief-attitude (Kusch 2011: 37).

Kusch claims that 'ordinary' beliefs have the following five features. 1. They tend to be described as 'opinions', 'views' or 'hypotheses'. 2. They are more or less reasonable; more or less well supported by evidence. 3. They are candidates for knowledge. 4. 'I am not sure' or 'possibly' are often someone else's responses to a profession of such beliefs. 5. They don't normally have the power to change our lives. 'Extraordinary' beliefs, on the other hand, differ in all these respects:

> 'Faith' and 'dogma' rather than 'opinion' and 'hypothesis' are the non-technical terms commonly used for extraordinary beliefs; extraordinary beliefs are not on the scale of being confirmed or falsified by empirical evidence; although 'extraordinary' beliefs are the 'firmest' of all beliefs, they are not candidates for knowledge; they are tied to strong emotions and pictures; they guide people's life; and their expression can be the culmination of a form of life (Kusch 2011: 38).

For example, the person holding an 'ordinary' belief that God exists takes the same attitude towards the belief's propositional content as he would towards an ordinary empirical prediction – i.e. he will regard it as more or less probable or as more or less well-supported by evidence – whereas the person holding an 'extraordinary' belief that God exists has a completely different, entirely 'firm', attitude not grounded in empirical evidence at all (Kusch 2011: 38; 2012: 12).

It is hard to see how this can be right. For, among other things, it is difficult to square with the central Wittgensteinian notion that meaning is use and that practice gives words their sense. Compare, for example, the following remarks:

> Actually I should like to say that ... the *words* you utter or what you think as you utter them are not what matters, so much as the difference they make at various points in your life. How do I know that two people mean the same when each says he believes in God? ... *Practice* gives the words their sense (1977: 85e).

> For a *large* class of cases – though not for all – in which we employ the word 'meaning' it can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is its use in the language (1953: §43).

If Wittgenstein is right, one struggles to make sense of the idea that the attitude one takes towards a belief makes *no* (or little) difference to the belief's propositional content. For taking an 'ordinary' belief-attitude towards the proposition that God exists seems to have obvious implications for what 'God exists' means. So, for instance, the person who, like Wittgenstein's Father O'Hara from the *Lectures on Religious Belief*, thinks that there is 'scientific' evidence for the existence of God, and consequently, in Kusch's parlance, has an 'ordinary' belief-attitude, will take the proposition that God exists to be a claim about a super-empirical object, while for Wittgenstein this is a misguided way of thinking about God. As Wittgenstein says in *Culture and Value*: 'The way you use the word "God" does not show *whom* you mean – but, rather, what you mean' (1977: 50e). On Wittgenstein's conception, in other words, 'God' does not denote some *thing* that one could encounter independently of having the concept in the sense that one could encounter a unicorn or the Loch Ness monster, say, if there happened to be such things. That is to say, Wittgenstein believes that while the surface grammar of the word 'God' functions in many ways analogously to that of an outlandish person, its depth grammar is actually quite different. This is shown, for example, by the fact that one cannot 'overhear' God talking to someone else – something that religious believers do not explain by reference to God's either being mute or out of earshot. But, if this is right, it seems that Father O'Hara and Wittgenstein's religious believer cannot, *pace* Kusch, believe the same things. For Father O'Hara believes that 'God' denotes a super-powerful entity for which there can be scientific evidence, whereas Wittgenstein's religious believer thinks it does not make sense to conceive of God in this way. *A fortiori* the propositional content of their respective beliefs must be different, even if O'Hara and Wittgenstein's religious believer use the same words to describe their beliefs.

If this is correct, then 'content' and 'attitude' cannot be divorced from each other in the way that the 'factorization' model requires. And this, in turn, means that understanding religious discourse is not as straightforward as one might, perhaps, at first imagine. For if belief-attitude and content are not distinct 'factors', it cannot be taken for granted that the religious believer and the atheist will be able to understand each

other simply in virtue of using the same words. As Wittgenstein says in the *Lectures on Religious Belief*:

> If you ask me whether or not I believe in a Judgement Day, in the sense in which religious people have a belief in it, I wouldn't say, 'No. I don't believe there will be such a thing. It would seem to me utterly crazy to say this.' And then I give an explanation: 'I don't believe in ... ', *but then the religious person never believes what I describe* (1966: 55, emphasis added).

If this is right, no clear distinction can be drawn between 'living in a certain way' and 'believing certain things', as *genuine* beliefs can never be divorced from and understood completely independently of the difference they make in one's life. So, Wittgenstein would reject the idea that beliefs are composed of two independent 'factors' – the belief's content and the belief-attitude. Rather, for Wittgenstein, 'content' and 'attitude' are mutually interdependent, since it is not possible to make sense of one without the other.

This also helps one to see why, *pace* Hyman and Nielsen, Wittgenstein cannot be a non-cognitivist who seeks to reduce the content of religious beliefs to the expression of emotional attitudes. For if one cannot 'factor out' the attitude from the content, neither can one reduce one to the other. When Wittgenstein, therefore, says, for example, that 'Christianity is not a doctrine, not, I mean, a theory about what has happened and will happen to the human soul, but a description of something that actually takes place in human life' (1977: 28e), he does not thereby mean that Christianity has no cognitive content. Rather, what he is suggesting is that being able, say, to recite the Creeds or Catholic dogma is not sufficient for having a proper understanding of religious concepts, as this requires being able to see religious utterances non-instrumentally, that is to say, it requires being able to see their *point* and aptness rather than their ability, as it were, to convey 'information' about God. And being able to see this is not possible, if Wittgenstein is right, independently of having some familiarity and grasp of the Christian form of life and the phenomenology of experience that gave rise to it. Hence, when Wittgenstein says that the important thing with regard to the Christian 'doctrine' is to understand 'that you have to change your *life*' or 'the *direction* of your life',[9] he is not implying that it is somehow possible to

[9] 'I believe that one of the things Christianity says is that sound doctrines are all useless. That you have to change your *life*. (Or the *direction* of your life.) ... The point is that a sound doctrine need not *take hold* of you; you can follow it as you would a doctor's

do this *without* committing oneself to the Christian claims. For to say that much more than rote-reciting is required, is not to say that therefore the 'doctrine' – the Christian claims – are irrelevant, as this would be as absurd as thinking that because a song can be sung both with and without expression, one could have the expression without the song (1966: 29).

Consequently, it is not the case, as is often supposed, that Wittgenstein denies that religious people believe different things to non-religious people. What he *is* denying is that any sense can be made of *what* those things are independently of paying attention to the form of life (or practice) which gives them sense.

V.

It is an upshot of Kusch's view that a criticism, on the basis of shared standards, of the very adoption of extraordinary standards, is ruled out. Following Bernard Williams, Kusch calls this a 'relativism of distance' (2011: 52). A 'relativism of distance' implies that 'disagreements' between people who hold extraordinary beliefs and those that do not, can be 'faultless'. I agree that there can be 'faultless *difference*' between religious believers and those who lack religious attitudes, but I think it is misleading to call this a form of relativism.

The reason why I would prefer to talk of 'faultless difference' rather than 'faultless disagreement' is of course that, contrary to Kusch, I do not think that the content of 'ordinary' and 'extraordinary' beliefs is the same. Consequently, believer and unbeliever do not necessarily have a 'disagreement' at all, for this presupposes that one can deny what the other affirms. But if, as I have argued, one first has to learn the grammar of religious beliefs before one can have disputes about them with the believer, then one cannot criticize religious beliefs by inspecting the words, or the putative 'propositional' content, alone. Rather, what Wittgenstein's view entails is that in order for disagreement to be possible, a shared common background must first be acquired that enables one to understand what, exactly, it is that the other is committed to. Without this being in place, one would not be able to contradict what the religious person says:

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prescription. – But here you need something to move you and turn you in a new direction ... Once you have been turned round, you must *stay* turned round. Wisdom is passionless. But faith by contrast is what Kierkegaard calls a *passion*' (1977: 53e).

> Suppose that someone believed in the Last Judgement, and I don't, does this mean that I believe the opposite to him, just that there won't be such a thing? I would say: 'not at all, or not always' ... 'Do you contradict the man?' I'd say: 'No' (1966: 53).

On Kusch's conception, Wittgenstein is not contradicting the religious believer, because while the latter has an 'extraordinary' belief-attitude to the proposition that there will be a Last Judgement, Wittgenstein merely has the 'ordinary', 'empirical' belief-attitude towards there not being such a thing. Since these belief-attitudes are distinct, there is no conflict between what the two parties say. The reason why Kusch is nevertheless happy to speak of an 'extraordinary' disagreement here is that even though the two parties do not straightforwardly contradict each other (since they have different belief-attitudes), they do 'disagree' about the *content* of their beliefs (since one of them believes that there will be a Last Judgement, while the other doesn't):

> To fully appreciate the contingency of having or lacking extraordinary beliefs is to recognize that the 'extraordinary disagreement' between the believer and the unbeliever may well be faultless: neither side need have made a mistake. This faultless epistemic peer disagreement is *not fully reasonable* – neither side is able to identify its evidence fully, not even to himself or herself. But this disagreement is *not altogether unreasonable either*: each side may well have done its best on the basis of its historically contingent sensibility (Kusch 2012: 22).

This is convincing only if one can make sense of the idea of 'extraordinary' evidence that Kusch invokes earlier on (2012: 14). For *prima facie*, one might wonder why, if 'extraordinary' beliefs have exactly the same content as 'ordinary' beliefs, but are just held more firmly on what seems to be flimsier evidence, one should so much as allow 'extraordinary' beliefs any kind of epistemic credibility. As Wittgenstein says:

> They [religious believers] base things on evidence which taken in one way would seem exceedingly flimsy. They base enormous things on this evidence. Am I to say they are unreasonable? I wouldn't call them unreasonable. I would say, they are certainly not *reasonable*, that's obvious (1966: 57-8).

> If you compare it [religious belief] with anything in Science which we call evidence, you can't credit that anyone could soberly argue: 'Well, I had this dream ... therefore ... Last Judgement.' You might say: 'For a blunder,

> that's too big.' If you suddenly wrote numbers down on the blackboard, and then said: 'Now, I'm going to add,' and then said: '2 and 21 is 13' etc. I'd say: 'This is no blunder' (1966: 61-2).

What Wittgenstein seems to be saying here is that if one believes that religious beliefs are based on 'evidence' in the way that scientific beliefs, for example, can be said to be based on evidence, then one is either, like Father O'Hara,[10] cheating oneself, or irrational. For, if one *really* believed that it made sense to argue 'dream – therefore Last Judgement' or 'miracles – therefore Son of God', then this is no ordinary mistake – that is to say, no simple blunder for which there is a place in the 'system'. Since Wittgenstein, unlike the author of *The Golden Bough*, for example, does not want to come to the conclusion, however, that 'the whole of mankind does all that [i.e. engages in religious practice] out of sheer stupidity',[11] he tries to find an alternative explanation: 'There are cases where I'd say he's mad, or he's making fun. Then there might be cases where I look for an entirely different interpretation altogether' (1966: 62). The 'entirely different interpretation' might comprise, for example, a refusal to interpret religious beliefs as being in any way *analogous* to scientific beliefs. That is to say, the believer isn't necessarily mad, but might rather be engaged in a different kind of activity: 'Whether a thing is a blunder or not – it is a blunder in a particular system ... You could also say that where we are reasonable, they are not reasonable – meaning they don't use *reason* here' (1966: 59). But it is a mistake to think, as Kusch does, that adopting such an approach is not going to have serious implications for the *content* of what is believed, but will merely affect one's belief-attitude.

For instance, when Wittgenstein is criticizing Father O'Hara's conception of religious belief, he isn't *merely* criticizing his *attitude*:

> Father O'Hara is one of those people who make it a question of science ... I would definitely call O'Hara unreasonable. I would say, if this is religious belief, then it's all superstition. But I would ridicule it, not by saying it is based on insufficient evidence. I would say: here is a man who is cheating himself. You can say: this man is ridiculous because he believes, and bases it on weak reasons (1966: 57-9).

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[10] Father O'Hara was a professor of physics and mathematics at Heythrop College London, who participated in a BBC debate about science and religion in the 1930s.

[11] Wittgenstein (1993: 119).

Wittgenstein is here taking issue with the very idea of trying to make Christianity probable. That is to say, Wittgenstein thinks that it is 'a confusion of the spheres', a kind of category mistake, to speak with Kierkegaard,[12] to treat a religious question as if it were a scientific question that could be settled by appeal to empirical evidence. It is this confusion that, according to Wittgenstein, turns religious belief into mere superstition – that is to say, into a form of false science.

Kusch agrees that Father O'Hara's religious belief is unreasonable:

> Superstition is unreasonable religious belief; in O'Hara's case it is religious belief falling way short of the appropriate extraordinary belief attitude ... Put differently, what might be convincing evidence (even for the believer) against religious belief taken as ordinary, is not at all evidence against extraordinary belief (2012: 13).

The reason why Kusch believes that 'ordinary' evidence is not evidence against 'extraordinary' belief is the following:

> Wittgenstein is adamant that one does not develop an attitude of extraordinary belief in response to mere ordinary evidence. Instead, it is the course of one's life as a whole that either causes one to have extraordinary beliefs or causes one not to have them. This cause is not a 'brute cause': it does not bring about extraordinary belief in the way a hit over the head or a drug might bring about a headache. It is a cause in terms of which the religious believer is able to make sense of his extraordinary beliefs, at least partially. And hence it seems appropriate to speak of this cause as 'extraordinary evidence' (2012: 13-4).

I agree with Kusch that 'Wittgenstein is adamant that one does not develop an attitude of extraordinary belief in response to mere ordinary evidence', but I'm not sure it is appropriate to speak of this cause as 'extraordinary evidence'. Consider, for example, the following remark:

> Life can educate one to a belief in God. And *experiences* too are what bring this about; but I don't mean visions and other forms of sense experience which show us 'the existence of this being', but, e.g., sufferings of various sorts. These neither show us God in the way a sense impression shows us an object, nor do they give rise to *conjectures* about him. Experiences, thoughts – life can force this concept on us (1977: 86e).

[12] See Kierkegaard (1998: 5).

If 'life' can educate one to a belief in God or 'force' this concept upon one, is it therefore correct to say that 'life' provides 'extraordinary' evidence for the existence of God? For how, one might wonder, can *life* provide *evidence* for anything? One might just as well say that life provides one with 'extraordinary evidence' for animism, the truth of scientology, or witches. And if, furthermore, animists, scientologists and witch-worshippers can 'faultlessly' disagree, then one would have, not a 'relativism of distance', but *rampant* relativism.

Kusch himself admits (in an email exchange) that one cannot take an extraordinary belief-attitude to just anything – for instance to Wayne Rooney's being a fool (Kusch's example). But, if so, then some criteria are needed that allow one to draw a line here, and it is hard to see where they might plausibly come from. What is more, it seems that such criteria would have to be driven by the *content* of what is believed, and this appears to be in tension with Kusch's contention that one can take both an 'ordinary' and an 'extraordinary' attitude to the same propositional content. For if certain contents are, as it were, more 'extraordinary attitude-apt' than others – which they would have to be if one wants to rule out that one can take an extraordinary attitude to 'just anything' – then all sorts of 'new' forms of 'unreasonable' belief will become possible. For example, one can take up an 'ordinary' attitude to something that is, in itself, an 'extraordinary' proposition, or take an 'extraordinary' attitude to something that 'really' only has empirical content. It is difficult to see either how one could make sense of such 'errors', or what it might mean to ascribe an 'intrinsic' content to a proposition. For the latter is clearly inconsistent with Wittgenstein's idea that meaning is use and therefore context-dependent.

For these reasons, the better option is to read Wittgenstein as rejecting altogether the notion that faith rests on an evidential basis.[13] Does that imply, though, that, on my conception, religious belief is utterly *groundless*? If by 'groundless' one means 'not based on any reasons whatsoever', the answer is 'no'; if by 'groundless' one means that belief in God is not 'evidentially grounded' in the way that satellite pictures of the Earth, say, provide evidential grounds for the proposition 'the Earth is round', the answer is 'yes'. In other words, one's life experiences might give one reason to believe in God, but those reasons are not *evidence* – not even 'extraordinary' evidence – for God's existence. For 'evidence'

[13] For more on this point, see my (2007), chapter 4.

ought to be something that everyone can independently appeal to as a justification, but this is not possible in the religious case. For example, one cannot extract a general rule from experiences that might motivate religious belief – i.e. one cannot reasonably argue that personal suffering proves the existence of God or will make one religious. Consequently, the overall shape of one's life might give one (personal) reasons to believe in God, but it is misleading to call this a form of 'evidence'. As Wittgenstein says:

> Unshakable faith. (E.g. in a promise.) Is it less certain than being convinced of a mathematical truth? – (But does that make the language games any more alike!) (1977: 84e)

Analogously, one might say: it is possible to employ the phrase 'extraordinary' evidence in the religious context, but that does little to make it any more similar to what one ordinarily calls 'evidence'. The language-games are very different here. It is for these reasons that Wittgenstein thinks that religious believer and atheist do not necessarily have a disagreement at all, but are rather engaged in different activities.

VI.

If what I have argued in this essay is correct, Kusch's 'factorization' model severely distorts Wittgenstein's conception of religious belief. It is possible to make sense of Wittgenstein's remarks without either having to ascribe an 'incommensurability' thesis or a form of relativism to him. Religious grammar can be learnt by the non-believer, but is 'irreducible' – i.e. it cannot be translated into ordinary discourse (or, indeed, into a 'language of science') without 'remainder'. This also implies that standard interpretations of Wittgenstein that attribute fideism or non-cognitivism to him are wide of the mark. Wittgenstein has no wish to do away with religious content and to reduce it to the expression of emotional attitudes. Consequently, he is not an expressivist. Wittgenstein's reflections on religious belief are ground-breaking precisely because they cannot be pressed into preconceived moulds. Hence, wouldn't it be odd if a philosopher who otherwise challenged the philosophical orthodoxy, came no further, in his reflections on religion, than the Logical Positivists?

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LIVING AS IF GOD EXISTS: LOOKING FOR A COMMON GROUND IN TIMES OF RADICAL PLURALISM

PETER JONKERS

Tilburg University

Abstract: This paper offers some comments on some metaphysical and epistemological claims of (critical) theological realism from the perspective of continental philosophy of religion, thereby taking the work of Soskice and Hick as paradigmatic for this kind of philosophical theology. The first comment regards the fact that theological realism considers religious and theological propositions as ways to depict or represent reality, and hence aims to bring them as much as possible in line with scientific ones. Some contemporary French philosophers (Ricoeur, Lévinas, and Marion) criticize such a representing, depicting knowledge of God, because it encapsulates the divine reality in mundane, specifically scientific categories. Eventually, theological realism runs the risk of annihilating God's radical transcendence and reducing religion to an alternative scientific theory. The second comment tries to explore whether one can affirm God's reality from a practical perspective, as a postulate of reason, and whether such an approach could serve as a common ground for religious and secular (practical) ways of life in times of radical pluralism. This comment begins by investigating the regulative character of Kant's idea of God as the highest idea of reason, which not only orientates our theoretical enquiries, but also our moral actions. Although this idea is only a heuristic fiction for theoretical reason, God's existence has to be affirmed on practical grounds, as a symbolic reality that gives orientation to people's lives.

I. INTRODUCTION

The debate between the proponents of theological realism and those of theological anti-realism has been almost exclusively the affair of analytic philosophy of religion. Unfortunately, contemporary continental

philosophy of religion has hardly paid attention to this debate, and hence has failed to enter into a fruitful dialogue with analytic philosophy of religion on this issue. In my view, one of the reasons for this neglect is that the core of the debate about (theological) (anti)realism has largely been perceived as a metaphysical one. Because contemporary continental philosophy predominantly concentrates on a deconstruction of metaphysics, it feels entitled to leave this debate aside. Another reason is that not only most continental, but also some analytic philosophers of religion, such as D.Z. Phillips, consider religion as primarily as giving orientation to life, rather than as a set of theoretical propositions about natural and supernatural states of affairs, which seems to be the focus of most proponents of theological (anti)realism.[1] Finally, continental philosophy is hardly interested in the kind of epistemological issues that analytic philosophy of religion is dealing with. If continental philosophy pays any attention at all to these kinds of questions, it does so in order to highlight the (problematic) consequences of religious truth claims in a pluralistic society.

In this paper I want to offer a modest contribution to a dialogue between analytic and continental philosophy of religion, by commenting on some underlying assumptions of theological realism from the perspective of continental philosophy of religion. The first comment regards the fact that theological realism considers religious and theological propositions as ways to depict reality, and hence aims to bring them as much as possible in line with scientific ones. More specifically, I will examine if an interpretation of God's reality on the basis of this metaphysical paradigm is tenable religiously. In this section I take Janet Soskice's work on theological realism as my point of departure. The second comment tries to explore whether a different kind of theological realism could be an option. In particular, I want to examine what happens to God's reality if one starts from the life-orienting dimension of religion rather than on focusing on His existence from a theoretical perspective. Moreover, I want to investigate whether such an approach could serve as a common ground in times of radical pluralism. In this section, I take John Hick's work as my point of departure.

[1] In support of this distinction between a theoretical and a practical approach of religion, see Niek Brunsveld, *The Many Faces of Religious Truth: Developing Hilary Putnam's Pragmatic Pluralism into an Alternative for Religious Realism and Antirealism* (Utrecht: Utrecht University, 2012), pp. 11f. Brunsveld distinguishes between the supernatural, the natural, and the life-orienting aspects of religion.

II. THE PROBLEM OF DEPICTING GOD'S REALITY

A fundamental epistemological assumption of theological realism is that religious or theological language is capable of depicting the divine reality, and hence, of offering a representing knowledge of this reality. Philosophical realism in general can be defined as holding that 'the historicity of linguistic understanding and the contextuality of meaning do not at all exclude that there can be criteria of meaning, truth and rationality that surpass contextuality and are related to reality. [...] Realist theories want to keep the claim on a possible objectivity of the human activity of meaning giving and proposition making, which goes beyond purely intersubjective or parochial convictions.'[2] As Janet Soskice has pointed out, a common claim of all kinds of philosophical realism is that our language somehow *refers* to reality, more specifically that science *depicts* reality by making use of models and metaphors.[3] Whereas in naïve realism, 'models are viewed as providing a description of how things are in themselves, and science is seen as a process of making immediate the hitherto invisible structures of the world',[4] critical realism considers these models 'not as logical ciphers but as terms which putatively refer to possible real entities, relations, and states of affairs'.[5] In sum, critical realism does not see the models and metaphors, used by scientific explanation, as heuristic fictions; instead, it regards scientific explanation as reality depicting. This does not mean that critical realism claims that science mirrors the world; rather it sees scientific terms 'as representing reality without claiming to be representationally privileged'.[6] This shows that Soskice makes a distinction between the reality depicting or referential *intention* of all scientific explanation and the figurative character of the *actual descriptions* that scientific models and metaphors provide of reality, implying that none of them has a privilege in representing reality.

Given the fact that metaphors not only play an important role in scientific theories, but are even more predominant in the domain of

[2] Hans-Peter Großhans, *Theologischer Realismus: Ein sprachphilosophischer Beitrag zu einer theologischen Sprachlehre* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1996), p. 6.

[3] Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), pp. 118 and 136.

[4] Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, p. 118.

[5] Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, p. 120. See Hans-Peter Großhans, *Theologischer Realismus,* pp. 12f.

[6] Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, p. 132.

religion and theology, Soskice applies the above distinction to religion and theology: they claim, just like science, to depict reality without having the pretension of giving a definitive and adequate description of the divine reality 'as it is'. She considers Anselm's famous formula in the *Proslogion,* 'God is that than which nothing greater can be conceived', as an excellent example of designating what a God must be without describing God.[7] Analogous to philosophical realism, theological realism can metaphysically speaking be defined as 'the view that there is a transcendent divine reality independent *at least in part* of human thought, action and attitudes'.[8] On an epistemological level, theological realism holds that our religious and theological language has the intention and is in principle able to depict this reality. Hence, religious language should not be taken only as expressing an emotive meaning, but also as having a reference to a human-independent reality, that can in principle be represented by human language. In sum, according to critical theological realism, 'the theist can reasonably take his talk of God, bound as it is within a wheel of images, as being reality depicting, while at the same time acknowledging its inadequacy as description.'[9]

In my view, Soskice's distinction between referring to God and defining or describing Him presents a major contribution to theological realism, in particular because it does justice to the insights of negative theology when we speak about God's reality: 'In our stammering after a transcendent God we must speak, for the most part, metaphorically or not at all.'[10] However, from the perspective of contemporary continental philosophy, a major problem of Soskice's approach is that she narrows down our religious and theological referring to God's reality to depicting or representing him. This enables her to link the kind of explanation of the world that religion and theology offer closely to a scientific explanation. But this goes at a considerable cost, namely that of turning religion and theology into the same kind of objectifying language and knowledge as science. The fact that theological realism aims to *represent* God raises the question whether this does not lead to encapsulating

[7] Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, p. 138.

[8] Hans-Peter Großhans, *Theologischer Realismus*, p. 1. In a similar vein, John Hick defines religious realism as 'the view that the objects of religious belief exist independently of what we take to be our human experience of them'. See: John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1989), p. 172.

[9] Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, p. 141.

[10] Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, p. 140.

him in a kind of objectifying knowledge that inevitably annihilates his divinity. In particular, Soskice does not seem to realize that the way in which e.g. physics uses the metaphor of the Big Bang in order to describe the origin of the universe differs completely from the metaphorical way in which Christians call God the creator of the world. I fully agree with her that metaphors play an essential role both in science and in religion, but there is a gulf that separates scientific metaphors from religious ones. The above example shows that not only is the relation between religious language and the reality it refers to a metaphorical one, but also the relation between religious and scientific language. Whereas Soskice deserves full credit for having clarified the former, she fails to give account of the latter.

2.1 The critique of onto-theology

As is common knowledge, the problems of a representing knowledge of God's reality and of putting religion and theology on the same line as science were first developed by Heidegger in the context of his deconstruction of metaphysics as ontotheology. It has had such an influence among continental philosophers that a whole generation considered any philosophical reflection on God's existence as contradictory. As I will show in the next subsection, three contemporary French philosophers, Paul Ricoeur, Emmanuel Lévinas, and Jean-Luc Marion, have taken Heidegger's critique to heart, but without considering it as the final judgment against thinking about God's reality philosophically. On the contrary, Heidegger has inspired them to develop alternative approaches, which present relevant alternatives to theological realism's representing knowledge of God.[11]

For Heidegger, the ontotheological nature of metaphysics has come to the fore since modernity, in particular from the moment that Being was reduced to an object of representing reasoning, human subjectivity was posited as the unique point of reference for all truth and value, and truth was defined in terms of objective certainty. This dramatic change in the history of Western culture has resulted in the rise of modern science, but it has also had an enormous impact on most philosophical approaches of God's existence. A closer look at modern philosophy and science shows

[11] I developed this issue in more detail in Peter Jonkers, 'God in France: Heidegger's Legacy', in Peter Jonkers, Ruud Welten (eds.), *God in France: Eight Contemporary French Thinkers on God* (Leuven: Peeters, 2005), pp. 1-42.

that the two are closely linked together: science accepts the philosophical idea of God as the ultimate foundation of nature, and philosophy accepts the kind of foundational knowledge that science offers as its paradigm. A clear example of this is link the concept of (sufficient) ground: Being is understood as ground, while thinking gathers itself towards Being as its ground in the manner of giving ground and accounting for the ground.[12] This ground is the ultimate principle, on the basis of which science *and* philosophy can represent the whole of reality as something radically coherent and transparent. From a philosophical perspective, only God qualifies for being this absolute ground and, consequently, modern philosophy attributes a central position to Him. Concretely, Heidegger thinks of Descartes' idea of the infinite, Leibniz's principle of sufficient ground, Spinoza's absolute substance, and Hegel's absolute idea. Theological realism could be added to this list, because it is governed by the same ideal of foundational and representing knowledge as modern science.

In the work of Ricoeur, the theme of the deconstruction of onto-theology plays a major role in his struggle with the tradition of reflective philosophy. Its discourse is characterized by universality, univocity, and unity and, as such, it is opposed to the plurality, equivocity, and particularity of the myths. With regard to the thinking of God, reflective philosophy proves that it is unable to think the essence of what faith is all about, the Wholly Other who addresses and questions us. This kind of philosophy is situated on the level of immanence and, therefore, it cannot say anything about vertical transcendence. According to Ricoeur, the ideal of foundationalism, on which reflective philosophy ultimately rests, is a manifestation of its hubris. Instead, philosophy should start from the plurality of individual myths and symbols, and reveal the universal and rational structure which is hidden in all religions. The consequence of this approach is not only an enlargement, but also a qualitative change of reflective consciousness. More specifically, it puts autonomous thinking and its ideal of complete reflexivity, transparency, and foundationalism under pressure. Ricoeur's argument ends in a rehabilitation of non-speculative language, a way of thinking without the totalizing and foundational pretensions of traditional metaphysics.[13]

[12] Martin Heidegger, 'Die onto-theo-logische Verfassung der Metaphysik', in Martin Heidegger, *Identität und Differenz* (Pfüllingen: Neske, 1957), pp. 31-67 (p. 48).

[13] For an excellent analysis of this aspect of Ricoeur's work, see: Theo de Boer, 'Paul Ricoeur: Thinking the Bible', in Peter Jonkers, Ruud Welten (eds.), *God in France*, pp. 43-67.

The critique of a thinking that aims at depicting and representing reality is also the point of departure in Lévinas's philosophical project. It aims at thinking of a God who does not coincide with the (supreme) being, but is precisely otherwise than Being. In one way or another ontotheology annihilates God's incomprehensible infinity by fitting him into a totalizing system. As a consequence, God's transcendence is overpowered and the infinite difference between man and God is ignored. By conceiving God within the network of Being, ontotheology also creates the impression of being able to thematize God and reduce Him to an object of re-presenting thinking.[14] Moreover, the subject appears in this context as the unique starting point of all initiative in the world; as such, the subject is convinced that it can never be disturbed, thrown off its balance, or displaced by the intrusion of the infinite. Hence, 'it is no coincidence that the history of western philosophy has resulted in an annihilation of transcendence.'[15] Lévinas thereby explicitly includes rational theology, and hence theological realism, and this in spite of its attempts to do justice to the idea of transcendence by qualifying God's existence with adverbs such as 'eminently' or 'par excellence'. In sum, Lévinas radically rejects all thinking that tries to represent or depict him, and this includes theological realism. Instead, the core of his philosophical project is 'to hear a God not contaminated by Being'.[16]

Marion's critique of ontotheology is influenced by that of Heidegger and Lévinas, as already becomes apparent from the startling title of his book *God Without Being (Dieu sans l'être)*.[17] He uses the twin concepts idol and icon to clarify and balance this issue. Idol refers to a human experience of the holy; it is a representation of the holy as seen only from a human point of view. A representation fixates, and the idol is precisely the point where the movement of fluid thinking stops and fixates itself. As far as philosophical theology is concerned, this attitude refers to a way of thinking about God in terms of representing and depicting his reality. As a representation, God is no longer infinite, but is being fixated within the boundaries of the human capacity of representing, and more specifically within those of the correspondence theory. Therefore, in order to avoid

[14] Emmanuel Lévinas, *De Dieu qui vient à l'idée* (Paris: Vrin, 1986), p. 100.

[15] Emmanuel Lévinas, *De Dieu qui vient à l'idée*, p. 95.

[16] Emmanuel Lévinas, *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1978), p. X.

[17] Jean-Luc Marion, *Dieu sans l'être* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1991).

conceptual idolatry one has to think about God outside the purview of metaphysics, and, in particular, outside that of theological realism.

2.2. Thinking of God as radically transcendent

It seems clear to me that these comments from the perspective of contemporary continental, in particular French philosophy are very relevant for the debate about theological realism. Ricoeur´s critique that natural theology fails to take into account the plurality and particularity of the Christian narrative about God's nature and existence does not turn him into an advocate of the anti-realist position. It rather shows him as someone who has taken Pascal's adage of the rift between the God of the philosophers and the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to heart and has introduced it in the current debate. Through his project of a non-speculative philosophy of religion, Ricoeur tries, on the basis of a hermeneutical analysis of the meaning of the Christian narrative, to discover its universal significance. In this respect, his position comes close to that of internal realism, which, just like Ricoeur, takes the plurality of religious languages as its point of departure, and situates the ontological claims of theological realism within these languages, thereby rejecting the rationalistic foundationalism that characterizes theological realism.[18] However, an important difference between these two positions is that internal realism leads to the conclusion that the affirmation of God's reality only makes sense within Christian dogmatics,[19] whereas Ricoeur's hermeneutic approach tries to move beyond the confines of the various religions, which enables him to affirm God's reality on a general, philosophical level.

Lévinas's and Marion's critique of the key concept of theological realism, namely representation or depiction leads them to affirm God as the radical Other, who disrupts all thinking in terms of correspondence and analogy. Lévinas wants to conceive a new, absolute notion of sense which cannot but lie radically at the other side of Being and which we can only trace through ethics as the unconditional appeal of the radically Other to me. With regard to the overcoming of ontotheology, Lévinas fundamentally differs from Heidegger: if philosophy takes God for Being, this inevitably implies that Being becomes the ultimate source of sense.

[18] Hans-Peter Großhans, *Theologischer Realismus*, pp. 266f.
[19] Hans-Peter Großhans, *Theologischer Realismus*, p. 267.

This shuts the door to a radically transcendent sense, that is to say, a sense intruding into earthly Being from outside or above, a sense that does not find its origin in the order of 'sameness' but in the incommensurable Other.[20] Lévinas's thinking aims at showing that an authentic sense-giving thinking, i.e., thinking that looks for a primordial, absolute sense, necessarily implies the explosion or the subversion of Being, since Being itself and the sense of Being only manifest themselves as a contingent history of beings and a heterogeneous multiplicity of senses.

Lévinas's notion 'God as otherwise than being' and, even more radically, Marion's provocative expression 'God without being' are not at all intended to query, let alone to negate the reality of God's existence, and hence are anything but a plea for theological anti-realism. Instead, they are the upshot of their phenomenological investigation of the way in which God 'comes to mind'. This implies a total passivity from the part of the subject, which can be compared to a trauma, inflicted by the idea of the infinite.[21] Although stemming from a different philosophical tradition, these remarks can only be interpreted as a fundamental critique of theological realism's approach of examining how the human mind can represent or depict God's reality. Phrased positively, these notions are meant to make us sensitive of the excessiveness of God's existence, radically exceeding the boundaries of (earthly) being.

III. GOD AS A POSTULATE OF REASON

My second comment on theological realism relates to the title of this paper, 'Living as if God exists'. At first sight, this title seems to cast an agnostic doubt on theological realism. Indeed, it leaves the metaphysical question about the ontological status of a transcendent divine reality as well as the epistemological question whether humans can affirm God's existence on objective grounds open. But, as I will show below in more detail, the expression 'living as if God exists' also encourages people to accept God's existence not so much on objective, but on practical grounds. Moreover, by encouraging *all* people to live as if God exists, irrespective of whether they are (Christian) believers or not, this expression aims to offer a transcendent common ground for our life-practices in times of radical pluralism.

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[20] Emmanuel Lévinas, *Dieu, la mort et le temps* (Paris: Grasset, 1993), p. 141.

[21] Emmanuel Lévinas, *De Dieu qui vient à l'idée*, p. 106.

In the history of philosophy, this position goes back to Kant, more specifically to his approach of God as a regulative idea of theoretical reason and as a postulate of practical reason. For Kant, distinguishing between a constitutive and a regulative employment of this idea is essential for avoiding dialectic semblance. A constitutive employment of the idea of God is erroneous, because it takes God as an object of theoretical knowledge, thus putting Him on a par with the objects of possible sensory experience.[22] But a regulative use of this idea is indispensible in order to orientate our theoretical thinking towards the greatest possible unity and opens up the way for postulating God's existence on a practical level. I will examine if and how this distinction and its implications on the level of practical philosophy shed a new light on theological realism.

As a sort of *captatio benevolentiae* for my approach, I want to note that one of the proponents of critical theological realism, John Hick, also makes use of Kant's philosophy in his investigation into the sensibility of affirming God's existence in a situation of religious pluralism. According to Hick, all world religions are valid renderings of the Ultimate Reality. His approach can be qualified as a realist one, because, ultimately, reality confers truth on religious propositions. Basic to Hick's critical theological realism is an interpretation of Kant's distinction between the phenomenal and the noumenal order, between reality as it appears to us and reality as it is in itself (the Real), and the contention that we always experience reality mediated through our preconceptions.[23] Critical theological realism admits that we are unable to experience or know the Real, but we do have good reasons to affirm its existence, because it appears to us through our concepts, language etc. In other words, critical theological realism rests on the conviction that humans give a cognitive, conceptually mediated and hence culturally situated response to a transcendent reality. We can never experience or know the Real as such, but it cannot be qualified as a purely imaginative projection either. Instead, 'the noumenal Real is experienced and thought by different religious traditions, as the range of gods and absolutes which the phenomenology of religion reports. And these divine *personae* and

[22] Immanuel Kant, 'Kritik der reinen Vernunft', in Immanuel Kant, *Werke in zehn Bänden*, Herausgegeben von Wilhelm Weischedel, *Band 4: Kritik der reinen Vernunft: Zweiter Teil* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1968), pp. B 670-680. All references to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* are taken from the second edition (=B) of 1787.

[23] John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, p. 241.

metaphysical *impersonae* [...] are not illusory but are empirically, that is experientially, real as authentic manifestations of the Real.'[24] In partial agreement, but also partial disagreement with Kant, Hick says that the Real *an sich* is postulated by us as a pre-supposition, not of the moral life, as it is for Kant, but of religious experience and the religious life. So, humans experience the Real, but only through their categorical schemes, thanks to which the Real becomes a meaningful phenomenal experience, to which they can respond in a cognitive way. The only thing we can say about the Real is that it is the reality whose influence produces, in collaboration with the human mind, the phenomenal world of our (religious) experience and the linguistic interpretations of it. Another important difference with Kant's philosophy is that, whereas the Kantian categories are universal and invariable because of their strictly formal nature, Hick's religious categorical schemes are culture-relative, thus being responsible for the wide variety of existing religions.[25]

Another recent example of someone who re-employs Kant's philosophy in a similar way as Hick is no one less than Joseph Ratzinger. It has to be noted first of all that Ratzinger is very critical of Hick's above-mentioned distinction between the phenomenal and the noumenal as a means to save theological realism in a situation of religious pluralism; he disqualifies this attempt as plainly relativistic, because it allows the Absolute only to exist in the form of historically and culturally situated models, whereas the Absolute as such cannot exist in history.[26] But notwithstanding his critique of the relativistic (at least, in his view)[27] conclusions Hick

[24] John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, p. 242.

[25] John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, pp. 243f.

[26] Joseph Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), pp. 120f. The chapter of this book in which he discusses Hick's views iwas presented as a paper on a conference in Mexico in 1996. See Joseph Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance,* p. 113.

[27] Ratzinger considers relativism (together with the predominance of scientific reason, which is fixated in its opposition to faith) as the most important threat of our times. Unfortunately, he is so much preoccupied by this problem that he fails to appreciate the urgent need of a serious investigation into the problem of (religious) pluralism, and does not seem to see that pluralism cannot be identified with relativism just like that. This prevents him, in my view, from an unbiased examination of Hick's ideas on this issue (see Joseph Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance,* pp. 119-122). For Hick's reaction, in which he points to the unfairness of Ratzinger's critique see: John Hick, *Dialogues in the Philosophy of Religion* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), pp. 157-160. However, in his later work (his critique of Hick's views on religious pluralism stems from 1996), Ratzinger seems to have taken a somewhat more open position with regard to (religious)

draws from Kant's theoretical philosophy, Ratzinger appreciates Kant's practical philosophy much more. In his book *Christianity and the Crisis of Cultures,* Ratzinger boldly suggests that a secular person, 'who does not succeed in finding the path to accepting the existence of God ought nevertheless try to live and to direct his life *veluti si Deus daretur,* as if God did indeed exist'.[28] The reason for Ratzinger to make such an exhortation, thereby referring to Kant's postulates of practical reason and Pascal's wager, is that it enables him to solve the problem of the ultimate foundation of moral normativity in contemporary, pluralist society. The idea of God refers to a dimension of reality and in particular of human life that is more fundamental than the differences in moral convictions between religious and secular people and thus precedes moral consensus building. In Ratzinger's view, the exhortation to live as if God indeed exists refers to the idea that in all human beings' ways of life there is a common ultimate goal, which transcends the here and now. He defines it as the *logos* that inheres the world, thus showing that this goal is not the result of political consensus building, but reversely that this consensus is oriented by this goal. This serves for Ratzinger as a regulative idea, whose reality has to be postulated in order to serve as a point of orientation for a true consensus between believing and secular people. But precisely because it is a regulative idea, it is impossible for any religion or secular philosophy of life to claim the possession of it; hence the 'as if'.[29]

3.1. God as a regulative idea of reason

My critique of the objective version of theological realism, offered by Soskice and others, points to the need of an alternative approach to God's reality. The above references to Hick and Ratzinger indicate that

pluralism. See e.g. Joseph Ratzinger, 'That Which Holds the World Together: The Pre-Political Moral Foundations of a Free State', in Jürgen Habermas and Joseph Ratzinger, *The Dialectics of Secularization: On Reason and Religion* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2006), pp. 53-80 (p.79).

[28] Joseph Ratzinger, *Christianity and the Crisis of Cultures* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press), 2006, p. 51.

[29] For a more extensive discussion of Ratzinger's position on this issue see Peter Jonkers, 'A Purifying Force for Reason? Pope Benedict on the Role of Christianity in Advanced Modernity', in Staf Hellemans and Joseph Wissink (eds.), *Towards a New Catholic Church in Advanced Modernity: Transformations, Visions, Tensions (Tilburg Theological Studies 5)* (Münster: Lit, 2012), pp. 79-102.

this kind of alternative I suggest is of a practical or life orienting nature. The shift that I suggest can be summarized by Kant's famous quote: 'I had to supersede knowledge in order to make room for faith.'[30] Contrary to some interpretations, this quote is anything but supporting the popular dichotomy between an unfaithful reason and an unreasonable faith. It rather shows that philosophy should, after having recognized that a kind of scientific knowledge that aims at representing or depicting the divine reality does not lead us to an understanding of God's reality. Instead, we should approximate him as the object of a *reasonable* faith, i.e. a faith that is not based on a particular religious revelation, but on universal reason, and hence has to be studied philosophically. Furthermore, this faith does not affirm God's existence on objective, but rather on subjective grounds, as a regulative idea. Finally, God's reality is a symbolic one, which links him to the cultural world instead of the natural one. In particular, God appears for Kant as the ultimate point of orientation of our lives. In this and the next section, I will explore Kant's complex insight further, focusing on its relevance for theological realism.

The practical approach that I propose and try to develop in this section is not intended to disqualify a theoretical investigation into the nature and characteristics of God's reality. On the contrary, the history of philosophical theology shows that it makes perfect sense to examine theoretically how to understand the articles of faith, e.g. that God is the creator of heaven and earth, that He is related to the world in a unique way, that He is a spiritual being, etc. But, in my view, these vital questions of theological realism only become relevant once one has accepted to put one's life in the sign of the risen Lord; that is, from a religious point of view. In other words, theological realism is unable to provide a common ground on the basis of which one can discuss what it means to believe in God. To my mind, a practical approach, which starts from a philosophical investigation into what it means to live as if God exists, is better suited to discuss religious issues in a pluralistic society, because it can be brought into dialogue with other, secular ways of life.

Let us start with exploring the Kantian background of Hick's distinction between the phenomenal and the noumenal and his postulating of the Real *an sich* as well as Ratzinger's suggestion to a secular person to live as if God indeed exists. For Kant, the idea of God, which belongs to the noumenal sphere, has an 'excellent, and indeed indispensably necessary

[30] Immanuel Kant, 'Kritik der reinen Vernunft', p. B XXX.

regulative employment'.[31] The function of this idea is that of 'directing the understanding towards a certain goal upon which the routes marked out by all its rules converge, as upon their point of intersection.'[32] The aim of reason is to connect the plurality, which characterizes the body of our knowledge, in conformity with a single, unifying principle, in order to turn this contingent aggregate of knowledge into a systematic whole. This unity of reason does not result from an abstraction of the plurality of our insights, but this plurality reversely presupposes a preceding idea of systematic wholeness, on the basis of which the place of these plural insights in the whole and their mutual relations can be determined. This idea not only orientates us in all our enquiries of nature, but also – as the highest good – in our moral actions.[33] As we shall see below, it is especially the moral or practical aspect of this orientating idea that is relevant in the context of this paper. On the level of theoretical reason, it is obvious that God cannot be an object of our actual knowledge, but can only be thought as an idea that contains no contradictions. Therefore, theoretical reason can only admit this idea in a problematic way. The term 'problematic' has a very specific meaning in this context: it does not mean that it makes no sense to think about God, but rather that the idea of God is assigned to us as a task for philosophical reflection, with the intention of bringing 'unity into the body of our detailed knowledge, and thereby to *approximate* the rule of universality'.[34]

What seems to me very relevant in Kant's ideas on this issue is first of all the idea that a philosophical reflection on God, including theological realism, should not focus on *objective* propositions about God's reality, but show that accepting the reality of God is necessary on *subjective* grounds. The term 'subjective' does not mean that such a reflection is inevitably biased in a religious way, nor that it is nothing but the expression of a private whim, but refers to a need of practical reason to make the highest good to the object of my will.[35] In other words, the idea

[31] Immanuel Kant, 'Kritik der reinen Vernunft', p. B 672.

[32] Immanuel Kant, 'Kritik der reinen Vernunft', p. B 672.

[33] See: Immanuel Kant, 'Kritik der praktischen Vernunft', in Immanuel Kant, *Werke in zehn Bänden*, Herausgegeben von Wilhelm Weischedel, *Band 6: Schriften zur Ethik und Religionsphilosophie*, p. 256, and Immanuel Kant, 'Was heißt: sich im Denken orientieren?', in Immanuel Kant, *Werke in zehn Bänden*, Herausgegeben von Wilhelm Weischedel, *Band 5: Schriften zur Metaphysik und Logik*, pp. 271-274.

[34] Immanuel Kant, 'Kritik der reinen Vernunft', p. B 675; see also pp. B 691 and B 697.

[35] Immanuel Kant, 'Kritik der praktischen Vernunft', pp. 256, 276.

of God is necessary for a human's never ending task to give meaning to the world in which he lives. So the suggestion to think of God as a regulative idea of reason is meant to move philosophical thinking away from all kinds of theoretical considerations about God's nature and attributes, and direct it towards a reflection on the idea of God as an indispensible life-orienting principle.

Although Hick builds on Kant's conception of God as noumenal, he does not follow Kant in his switch from an objective, theoretical approach of God to a subjective, practical one. The consequence of this is that Hick, just like Soskice, ends up with a rather objectivistic approach of God (or of the 'Real', as he calls it), which fails to do justice to the committed, practical way in which all people, regardless whether they are Christian or not, orient themselves in their lives to God. For Hick, 'the Real is experienced by human beings [...] in a manner analogous to that in which [...] we experience the world: namely by informational input from external reality being interpreted by the mind in terms of its own categorical scheme and thus coming to consciousness as meaningful phenomenal experience.' The Real, then, 'is the reality whose influence produces, in collaboration with the human mind, the phenomenal world of our experience'.[36] This shows that, for Hick, the Real serves as the ground of our experience of the world in a similarly neutral, objective way as science argues that gravity is the ground of mass. But this neutral, objective observation about such a ground differs fundamentally from the committed way in which religious people experience God as the ground of their lives, which is precisely the point that Kant tries to make when he calls the idea of God a regulative idea of reason. In sum, Hick tries to combine an objective and a subjective approach, a theoretical and a practical one, a neutral and a committed one, but fails to notice the fundamental rift that separates these two domains of reality, as well as the fact that, in religious matters, the latter approach predominates.

What this practical, life-orienting approach to God concretely means becomes apparent when we make a short detour and further examine Ratzinger's puzzling exhortation to secular people to 'live as if God exists'. He is obviously intrigued by the universality that Kant's regulative use of the idea of God implies, and applies it to the problem of a moral and political normativity in a radically pluralist world. Contemporary democratic society is confronted with the problem that, because every

[36] John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, p. 243.

kind of normativity should be the result of political consensus only, it runs the risk that a coincidental majority can impose its views, which eventually may prove to be unjust. In Ratzinger's view, this problem is symptomatic for a pluralistic society that by definition lacks a common moral point of orientation that transcends the here and now.[37] The very reality of societal pluralism shows that the idea of such a moral and political normativity is not actually 'available' as an object of moral knowing, but it is nevertheless 'subjectively' needed for the sake of justice. In Ratzinger's eyes, Kant's proposal to approach God as a universal regulative idea in order to orientate the plurality of human thinking towards an original idea of systematic and dynamic unity is very useful to offer a solution to this problem. Because of its transcendent character, the idea of a moral and political normativity is inevitably a regulative one, which means that it cannot be given objectively, but only problematically. It is the asymptotic point, to which the existing moral plurality endlessly approximates without ever being able to reach it. But at the same time it is far more than a neutral hypothesis that may be introduced in order to solve a theoretical problem. Instead, it is indispensible for all people, religious and secular, since it fulfils their (subjective) need to orient their lives towards such a unifying point, so that it can serve as a common ground in times of radical pluralism. Hans Joas has made a suggestion in this respect that deserves to be further examined: he proposes the idea of human dignity as a universal principle that orients the existing plurality of moral and political norms and thus serves as a guiding principle for a just consensus building.[38] When we apply this to Ratzinger's suggestion of living as if God exists, it means that all people, religious and secular, should be prepared to let their lives be oriented by such a normative principle. Precisely because it is not actually given as an object of (moral) knowledge, this principle is left open to diverse interpretations, religious and secular ones, and hence can serve as a common ground in times of radical pluralism.

Kant's account of the indispensable regulative function of the idea of God helps me to comment on another important aspect of critical

[37] I have shown elsewhere that prominent secular political philosophers, such as Habermas and Rawls, also take this as a crucial problem for liberal societies. See: Peter Jonkers, 'A Purifying Force for Reason? Pope Benedict on the Role of Christianity in Advanced Modernity', pp. 92-96.

[38] Hans Joas, *Die Sakralität der menschlichen Person: Eine neue Genealogie der Menschenrechte* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2011), p. 303.

theological realism, which also plays a predominant role in Hick's philosophy of religion. According to Hick, our cultural situatedness implies that all the world religions are different or even conflicting renderings of the same ultimate reality, while none of them can legitimately claim to be the one and only true rendering of this reality.[39] He uses the Kantian distinction between the phenomenal order of religious diversity and the noumenal order of the one ultimate reality to underpin his view philosophically. By accepting the reality of religious pluralism and showing that all world-religions are renderings of the Real, Hick is able to give a solution to the intricate problem of religious exclusivism. However, in my opinion, Kant's distinction has another important consequence for religious pluralism, which seems to have escaped Hick's attention. In Kant's view, the noumenal, in particular the idea of the Real *an sich*, not only fundamentally differs from the phenomenal variety of religions, but also serves as a regulative idea for phenomenal reality. Again, Hick accepts the first insight, but refuses the second. He considers the Real *an sich* as so fundamentally different from its appearance in mundane reality that the former cannot be qualified in any way by human thinking. The Real *an sich* 'cannot be said to be one or many, person or thing, substance or process, good or evil, purposive or non-purposive'.[40] We only can make certain purely formal statements about the Real in itself, such as Anselm's definition of God as that than which no greater can be conceived.[41]

The above not only implies that we are unable to qualify the Real *an sich* in any substantial way, but also, reversely, that the Real cannot serve as a reference point to distinguish between authentic and inauthentic manifestations of it. On the other hand, Hick also recognizes 'that not all religious persons, practices and beliefs are of equal value',[42] and develops criteria to make such distinctions on rational grounds. He thereby comes to the conclusion that 'religious traditions and their various components – beliefs, modes of experience, scriptures, rituals, disciplines, ethics and lifestyles, social rules and organizations – have greater or less value according as they promote or hinder the salvific transformation'.[43] But these criteria are only internal, i.e. they only

[39] John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, p. 243.
[40] John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, p. 246.
[41] John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, p. 246.
[42] John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, p. 299.
[43] John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, p. 300.

concern the phenomenal variety of religions, but have no relation to the Real *an sich,* which is radically external with regard to the phenomenal plurality of religions. In my view, Hick's position is quite problematic in this respect, because one cannot, on the basis of purely internal criteria, determine why a religion should be salvific at all, or why the spiritual and moral fruits of one religious tradition are more salvific than those over another one. On a more fundamental level, Hick's position yields to non-realism: if the Real *an sich* does not qualify the phenomenal (variety of religions) in any way, one can legitimately ask whether we could not as well drop it altogether.

By contrast, Kant's suggestion about the regulative function of the noumenal with regard to the phenomenal order offers a far better solution to this problem. When applied to philosophy of religion, the regulative idea of reason does not provide an unequivocal *positive* criterion to determine which religion is the one and only true one, but it does offer a crucial *negative* criterion to criticize (aspects of) religions that run counter to this idea, because they fail to include certain crucial aspects of salvation. Moreover, because of its noumenal character, this regulative idea is external with regard to the phenomenal variety of religions, and hence is able to offer a stronger kind of normativity than the internal criteria that are developed by the various religions. In my view, Kant's suggestion does more justice to the essential critical dimension of philosophy of religion with regard to all the existing religions than Hick's position.[44]

3.2. Is the idea of God nothing but a heuristic fiction?

However, the crucial question that has not yet been answered is how the indispensible regulative employment of the idea of God relates to theological realism's most fundamental claim, namely God's existence as an independent reality. Let us first again explore Kant's position on

[44] Kant points out the critical function of transcendental theology, to which theological realism belongs, quite clearly. Foreshadowing the affirmation of God's existence as a postulate of practical reason he states: 'For if, [...] perhaps on practical grounds, the *presupposition* of a supreme and self-sufficient being, as the highest intelligence, established its validity beyond all question, it would be of the greatest importance [...] to free it from whatever [...] is out of keeping with the supreme reality, and at the same time to dispose of all counter-assertions, whether *atheistic, deistic,* or anthropomorphic.' See Immanuel Kant, 'Kritik der reinen Vernunft', p. B 668.

this problem a bit further. The excellent and indispensible regulative employment of the idea of reason does not mean that this idea would be more for theoretical reason than a *focus imaginarius*, or a heuristic fiction.[45] This means that it has no objective reality and thus cannot become an object of scientific knowledge. In order to clarify things somewhat Kant compares the idea of reason with the image in a mirror of an object behind us. Because what we see in the mirror is only a reduced image of the 'real' object, it lacks essential aspects of objectivity (it has no depth, cannot be touched, heard or smelled). Hence, this image is not an object of our knowledge in the strict sense, so that its ontological and epistemological status can never be more than that of a heuristic fiction. It is obvious that, in this theoretical respect, calling God a heuristic fiction runs counter to theological realism's affirmation of God's objective existence. But Kant also states that this image is indispensible in order find out (the Greek word heuristein literally means to find out) what is happening behind our back; in other words, although this image is a heuristic fiction on a theoretical level, it is nevertheless indispensible in a practical sense, namely for our orientation, e.g. when we drive a car. Hence, counter to theological realism's affirmation of the objective reality of God Kant concludes that the best theoretical philosophy can make of it is 'that the things of the world must be viewed *as if* they received their existence from a highest intelligence'.[46] The combination of 'must' and 'as if' shows that God is an *objectively* problematic idea, while assuming his existence is *subjectively* indispensible.

The above shows that Kant passes a negative judgment on any philosophical affirmation of God's existence as an objective, independent reality, but also that he leaves room for another approach, which he qualifies as a subjective or practical one. He describes the difference between these two approaches as follows: '[T]heoretical knowledge may be defined as knowledge of what *is,* practical knowledge as the representation of what *ought to be*.'[47] Practical knowledge is not limited to a set of moral principles, but comprises all conditions that are necessary for humans to commit themselves to acting morally. This includes God as a postulate of practical reason. Postulating God on practical grounds clearly differs from taking him as a theoretical hypothesis: '[T] he

[45] Immanuel Kant, 'Kritik der reinen Vernunft', pp. B 672f.; see also p. B 699.
[46] Immanuel Kant, 'Kritik der reinen Vernunft', pp. B 698f.; see also p. B 714.
[47] Immanuel Kant, 'Kritik der reinen Vernunft', p. B 661.

moral laws do not merely presuppose the existence of a supreme being [as an optional and contingent hypothesis], but also [...] justify us in postulating it, though, indeed, only from a practical point of view.'[48] This means practical reason does not provide us with knowledge of God *an sich,* apart from our conceptual structures, so that we have no idea at all of God's reality, nor how to represent or to depict him. But although God is no object of theoretical reason, He is the ultimate object of our moral will as (an element of) the highest good. In order to make this object possible, His existence has to be postulated by practical reason. The postulates 'do not enlarge speculative knowledge, but (through their connection to practical matters) they give an objective reality to the ideas of speculative reason.'[49]

The above analysis makes clear that God is definitely more than a heuristic fiction. However, in order to serve as a relevant comment on theological realism this 'more' needs further qualification. First of all, stating that God's reality is a postulate of practical reason implies that the affirmation of His existence cannot result from theoretical considerations, such as the correspondence between our religious concepts and propositions and supernatural reality, or from an analogy between the natural and the supernatural.[50] As I argued in the second section of this paper, God fundamentally exceeds all worldly categories, so that every attempt to affirm his existence on the basis of such a correspondence or analogy inevitably leads to an imaginative projection, and, hence, from a religious perspective, to idolatry. Instead, I propose to think of God as a symbolic reality, which defines Him as a spiritual, rather than as a natural reality. More specifically, as the highest good God is the ultimate orientation point of our lives as moral beings, and hence is the highest, transcendent symbolic reality. This also relates God's existence to the domain of human culture, but without linking him exclusively to this or that specific (religious) culture, nor reducing him to a product

[48] Immanuel Kant, 'Kritik der reinen Vernunft', p. B 662.

[49] Immanuel Kant, 'Kritik der praktischen Vernunft', p. 264.

[50] On this point I do not agree with Brunsveld's interpretation of Hick's position. Brunsveld links Hick's postulating of God's existence with a correspondence between the phenomenal and the noumenal. But Hick considers the Real *an sich* (the noumenal) as so fundamentally different from its appearance in mundane reality that the former cannot be qualified in any way by human thinking. This implies that there cannot be a correspondence between the noumenal and the phenomenal world. See Niek Brunsveld, *The Many Faces of Religious Pluralism,* p. 44.

of it. Thinking of God as a symbolic reality somehow softens the rift between the phenomenal and the noumenal, not on a theoretical, but on a practical level. Furthermore, qualifying God's symbolic reality as the highest good offers a philosophical underpinning the essential salvific character of the Real, which Hick refuses to accept.

Finally, the affirmation of God as a symbolic reality, more specifically as the highest good, may be seen as an expression of reasonable faith. This faith is reasonable and not revealed, because it 'springs from pure reason (according to its theoretical as well as its practical use)'.[51] In this respect, Kant makes an important distinction between opining, knowing, and believing, which sheds an important light on the epistemological aspect of theological realism. Holding something to be true rests, of course, on objective grounds (namely on the correspondence of a judgment with an object or state of affairs), but also requires a subjective element, which is called a conviction (if the judgment is valid for every reasonable being) or a persuasion (if it is a private opinion). As to the subjective aspect of the validity of a judgment, more specifically of a conviction, Kant distinguishes three levels: *'Opining, believing and knowing. Opining* is such holding of a judgment as is consciously insufficient, not only objectively, but also subjectively. If our holding of the judgment be only subjectively sufficient, and is at the same time taken as being objectively insufficient, we have that what is termed *believing.* Lastly, when the holding of a thing to be true is sufficient both subjectively and objectively, it is *knowledge*.'[52] As far as we are striving for the enlargement of our theoretical knowledge, we are not permitted to hold the judgment that God really exists to be true, because there is no object or state of affairs to which such a judgment corresponds; in other words, the judgment that God really exists, as theological realism claims, lacks the objective sufficiency that is needed for all theoretical knowledge. But from a practical point of view it very well makes sense to believe or have faith in the truth of a judgment that is insufficient to hold true from a theoretical point of view. This is especially the case when practical reason requires a point of orientation for our moral life, while lacking objective certainty about it. Hence, it makes perfect sense to have a reasonable faith (as opposed to a revealed one) in God, which allows us to hold the judgment that

[51] Immanuel Kant, 'Kritik der praktischen Vernunft', p. 257.

[52] Immanuel Kant, 'Kritik der reinen Vernunft', p. B 850. It has to be noted that the German word 'Glaube' can be translated both by 'belief' and 'faith'.

God exists to be true on sufficient subjective grounds, although we are fully aware that we lack the objective sufficiency that would make this judgment to a certainty for theoretical knowledge.

CONCLUSION

With this paper I hope to have shown that theological realism's predominantly theoretical approach to God's reality is problematic, basically because it rests on the epistemological presupposition of being able to represent or depict the divine reality in a way that is similar to science. Instead, I suggest to approach God's reality from a practical perspective, as an indispensible regulative idea for our orientation in life. This does not reduce God to a heuristic fiction, but affirms his reality on a symbolic level, as a postulate of practical reason.

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CONSTRUCTING A RELIGIOUS WORLDVIEW: WHY RELIGIOUS ANTIREALISM IS STILL INTERESTING

THOMAS SCHÄRTL

University of Augsburg

Abstract. After a short overview of anti-realist positions within the philosophy of religion, the following paper argues in favour of a moderate version of religious anti-realism. Especially the notions of 'revelation' and 'religious experience' seem to suggest that certain dichotomies (i.e. the fact/values dichotomy) that are typical for realism cannot be upheld consistently within philosophy of religion. However, the end of the paper shows a different route, which might overcome the realism/antirealism dichotomy as such.

I. WHAT ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?

A very prominent definition of theistic/theological antirealism turns out to be somewhat inadequate. Michael Scott and Andrew Moore, for instance, have introduced the following prima-facie insightful distinction:

> Theological realism is the theory that there is a transcendent divine reality, the principal object of religious belief and language, the existence of which is not contingent upon (or, positively, is independent of) our thoughts, actions and attitudes. Theological non-realists maintain that meaningful religious faith and language are possible without there being any such independently existing entity.[1]

Scott's and Moore's definition of 'theological non-realism' is, taken at face value, not a description of theological or religious anti-realism, but

[1] Michael Scott and Andrew Moore, 'Can Theological Realism Be Refuted?', *Religious Studies*, 33 (1997), 401-418, esp. 402.

rather an explication of atheism, cloaked in a version of non-realism. It is pretty obvious that only a certain fraction of contemporary philosophy of religion wants to be associated with that sort of non-realism, which is pretty much the same thing as what we should call 'irrealism' (a point of view we will deal with in a couple of paragraphs). It is not wrong to offer this sort of narrow definition of non-realism. Unfortunately, however, this definition leads to a rather unwelcome consequence: It blurs the lines of the differences in anti-realistic concepts within philosophy of religion, since too many philosophical approaches that are fond of anti-realism are pushed towards irrealism and, at the end of the day, are predominantly interpreted as 'irrealist'. But this is neither fair nor correct. Only a few authors – literature on that topic usually mentions Don Cupitt, but we need to be careful with that assessment[2] – fulfil the description as an approach that turns anti-realism into irrealism.

Certain confusions in labelling might tell us that we are in need of a sharper distinction of different types of antirealism especially in the area of theology and philosophy of religion. Therefore, it would be beneficial to introduce Crispin Wright's term[3] 'irrealism' and Simon Blackburn's phrase[4] 'quasi-realism' to our vocabulary; but we have to use those terms with a grain of salt when it comes to philosophy of religion. Thus the following definitions are rather stipulative than explicative or descriptive by referring back to the leading philosophers that might have coined the phrase in question.

Friendly irrealism should be seen as a position that holds certain ontological commitments under certain circumstances to be empty; we could think of philosophers like Ludwig Feuerbach, who don't believe in the existence of God, but still think that religious language is meaningful if, for example, re-interpreted from a certain perspective, since religious God-talk is the result of a misleading reference shift that ascribes idealized properties to an individual entity called God while the properties in question must actually be ascribed to an abstract entity

[2] Cf. Don Cupitt, *Taking Leave of God* (London: SCM Press, 1980). For further discussions compare Peter Byrne, *God and Realism* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), pp. 107-125, esp. 109-118.

[3] Cf. Crispin Wright, 'Realism, Anti-Realism, Irrealism, Quasi-Realism', in *Saving the Differences: Essays on Themes from Truth and Objectivity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), pp. 11-47.

[4] Cf. Simon Blackburn, *Essays in Quasi-Realism* (Oxford – New York: Oxford Univerity Press, 1993).

called mankind.[5] Contemporarily, Pirmin Stekeler-Weithofer's approach could be seen as a version of *friendly irrealism* with regard to religion.[6] Although Stekeler-Weithofer doesn't actually believe in the existence of God, he is able to treat religious language as a system of symbols keeping an honourable and very dignified image of human nature, which has the fascinating capacity to transcend its very own boundaries, alive.[7] Another, equally sophisticated form of friendly irrealism can be found in Markus Gabriel's remarks on religion. To him the phrase 'God' is more or less a symbol or a placeholder for the infinity of social relations we may (theoretically) encounter as finite human beings.[8] But there is no additional meaning to the phrase 'God' – at least not in the ways classical theism may have pictured it.

Hostile irrealism, on the other hand, would agree that the ontological commitments of religious sentences are empty, but would add that we have no justification to treat religious utterances as something meaningful. Sigmund Freud's position might come close to hostile irrealism, since he regards religious propositions as the fallout of psychological facilities that aren't always properly aimed at healthy or truthful goals.[9]

Quasi-realism, instead, should be defined as the position that ascribes rationality and, therefore, cognitive value to religious utterances, but would insist that religious sentences do not have truthmakers in a way statements about the physical world have; while statements about the physical world are 'made true' (and, of course, one needs to ask whether or not this is a meaningful phrase as it stands) by physical states of affairs, for religious quasi-realism there are no comparably well-identified 'religious' states of affairs (consisting of specifically religious entities or entities that instantiate specifically religious properties) that could work as the requested truthmakers.

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[5] Cf. Ludwig Feuerbach, *Das Wesen des Christentums* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1969 [RP 2011]), pp. 52-79.

[6] We may also wonder whether or not friendly irrealism is the only positive answer an empiricist philosophy can give to the question of religion. Cf. Andrew Moore, *Realism and Christian Faith: God, Grammar, and Meaning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 41-43.

[7] Cf. Pirmin Stekeler-Weithofer, *Sinn* (Berlin – New York: De Gruyter, 2011) pp. 43-70, 121-144.

[8] Cf. Markus Gabriel, *Warum es die Welt nicht gibt* (Berlin: Ullstein, 2013), pp. 177-213, esp. 208-213.

[9] Cf. Sigmund Freud, *Die Zukunft einer Illusion* (Leipzig: Internationaler psychoanalytischer Verlag, 1927).

Thus, the first order of business should be to refrain from treating irrealism as a version of anti-realism. Irrealism is – plain and simple – the denial of the existence of certain types or certain tokens of being. You can thus be an irrealist about unicorns but a realist with regard to superstrings at the lowest micro-level of the universe. You can be a realist concerning everyday objects but an irrealist when it comes to universals, etc. Positions like that do not even touch the true motivation of anti-realism as we should try to understand it. Something similar should be said for quasi-realism. Its immediate concern is the relation between certain statements and their presumed truthmakers holding on to the idea that states of affairs are rather peculiar entities most intimately related to the nature of facts.[10] Quasi-realism may be combined with anti-realism and the other way round; but they shouldn't be equated. In an unequivocal way, anti-realism needs to be anchored in the mind-dependency-thesis. For this is what makes anti-realism most interesting and most controversial. Some support for this proposal may be offered by the other side of the spectrum. Therefore, William Alston's explication of 'metaphysical realism' is quite noteworthy:

> As a preliminary characterization of the kind of metaphysical realism being considered here, it is opposed to the view that whatever there is, is constituted, at least in part, by our cognitive relations thereto, by the ways we conceptualize it or construe it, by the language we use to talk about it or the conceptual scheme(s) we use to think of it.[11]

So, we have to raise the question: What is anti-realism in the philosophy of religion? To come up with a satisfying answer it might be helpful to turn to a more general characterization of anti-realism as such. Following Raimo Toumela, who offers a survey of the most basic anti-realistic convictions, we can name seven different 'symptoms' that lead to an anti-realistic approach:

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[10] I am aware that this is a very charitable interpretation of quasi-realism. In literature we also find the idea that quasi-realism is always accompanied by fictionalism. And one may wonder whether or not fictionalism is disastrous to the self-understanding of religious expressions and their commitments. Cf. David Lewis, 'Quasi-Realism is Fictionalism', in *Fictionalism in Metaphysics*, ed. by Mark Kalderon (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), pp. 314-321; a critical response to that comes from Simon Blackburn, 'Quasi-Realism No Fictionalism', in *Fictionalism in Metaphysics*, pp. 322-338.

[11] William P. Alston, 'What Metaphysical Realism is Not', in *Realism and Antirealism*, ed. by William P. Alston (Ithaca – London: Cornell University Press, 2002), pp. 97-115, esp. 97-98.

(1) The analytic-synthetic as well as the scheme-content distinction in the traditional sense should be abolished (cf. Quine).
(2) The Myth of the Given should be rejected (cf. Sellars).
(3) It is central to make the distinction between naturalistic (non-epistemic) and epistemic discourse or, if you prefer, between the order of being and the epistemic order (cf. Sellars).
(4) The assumption of psychological nominalism is correct, viz., all awareness of abstract entities is at bottom a linguistic affair (cf. Sellars).
(5) Language and justification are social and historical affairs (this comes from pragmatism).
(6) There is no strict fact-value dichotomy to be made at least on the level of ordinary language (pragmatism, hermeneutics).
(7) The main goal of philosophy is edification and conversation (hermeneutics).[12]

Not all of these items on the list have to go into your cart if you want to buy in to anti-realism. Especially (7) represents a rather *metaphilosophical* conviction, as Tuomela points out,[13] which is not required to be an antirealist although some prominent antirealists in the more general areas of theoretical philosophy (take, for instance, Richard Rorty) or in the rather special area of philosophy of religion (a paradigmatic case would be D. Z. Phillips) would sign off on (7). However, the heart of the anti-realistic creed is written down in sentences (2)-(6). But still, these theses report only symptoms of anti-realism (or descriptions of symptoms that are, indeed, extraordinarily helpful in identifying anti-realism in the history of philosophy and in contemporary debates) but do not show the core of anti-realism which, to my estimation, must consist of a more or less elaborate rejection of a global or, at least, regional mind-independency-thesis. But still, the above-mentioned symptoms are very helpful in drawing the lines between anti-realism and irrealism since neither of those sentences implies subjectivism or non-cognitivism or the straightforward denial of the existence of God. That some friendly irrealists might take advantage of one or the other of these characteristics of anti-realism is a matter of fact but not a matter of necessary entailment.

[12] Raimo Tuomela, 'The Myth of the Given and Realism', *Erkenntnis*, 29 (1988), 181-200, esp. 191.
[13] Ibid., pp. 191-192.

Analogically, there is the possibility of combining anti-realism with quasi-realism when it comes to the notion of truth and the 'notorious' truthmaker question (as some would say); but only a few of the above-mentioned criteria – especially (4) and (5) which, by themselves, are neither necessary nor sufficient conditions of anti-realism – connect directly to quasi-realism. A strong link between irrealism and quasi-realism in religion can be established if we take a more or less empiricist interpretation of factualism as the ultimate starting point.[14]

Given that Tuomela's checklist dates back to the times when the realism/antirealism controversy originated, one might wonder whether or not this list is still accurate. So, for example, the realist might not want to have the 'myth of the given' strapped to his back (see item (2) on the list). And, equally, the antirealist might not want to be associated with versions of 'psychologism' – or whatever could be linked to that notion – and the like (compare item (2) of Tuomela's list). Given that there are more subtle versions of realism[15] and antirealism available in the meantime, Tuomela's list needs improvement. With respect to more recent discussions of the topic, the following list might serve as a better litmus test of (metaphysical) antirealism. Therefore, let us suppose that it is typical for antirealism:

(1) to be opposed to the fact-/value-dichotomy as well as the content/attitude- and the content/form-dichotomy,
(2) to treat reference as an affair that essentially reflects a speaker's attitudes and convictions (which implies to be critical about a causal theory of linguistic reference) and to treat justification as linguistic and, therefore, cultural affairs,
(3) to criticize a connection between truth and justification that is too loose (while emphasizing that truth is idealized justification),
(4) to reject a correspondence theory of truth in favour of coherence in order to treat 'truthmaking' as a predominantly linguistic and logical affair,

[14] For a deeper analysis of these connections compare Michael Scott, 'Wittgenstein and Realism', *Faith and Philosophy*, 17 (2000), 170-190, esp. 174-177.

[15] It is up for discussion whether any version of realism that does not hold equally strong antitheses to what Tuomela has pinned down as the antirealist's Creed might turn into 'blind' realism. See Robert Almeder, 'Blind Realism', *Erkenntnis*, 26 (1987), 57-101. Presumably, a blind realist might be opposed to items (2) to (4) on my new list of criteria, which shows that blind realism is a significantly weaker position than straightforward metaphysical realism.

(5) to be deflationist with regard to the common truthmaker talk (since this is seen as the last outpost of the correspondence theory of truth),
(6) to point out that there is not just one language/conceptual system that can be justified as the solely correct description of the world,
(7) to be nominalist and/or pragmatist about abstract entities (like universals, rules, laws, etc.).

This list is still just an enumeration of certain symptoms that are quite typical for an antirealist position. But the core-conviction is not even on the list yet. It is the idea (as indirectly presented by Alston's definition of metaphysical realism) that the mind-independency-thesis is wrong.

II. FLAVOURS OF RELIGIOUS ANTI-REALISM

With some of the above developed distinctions in mind it becomes quite interesting to take a second look at the notorious role models of religious anti-realism, especially D. Z. Phillips, Gordon Kaufman and John Hick. There is the unanimous conviction within the realistic camp of philosophy of religion that Phillips's, Kaufman's and Hick's views contain the leitmotif of anti-realistic opposition to realism. But what does this mean specifically?

In Phillips we find the idea that there are no unequivocal standards of referring or justifying, so that religious language has to be treated differently compared, for example, to scientific language:

> The whole conception [...] of religion standing in need of justification is confused. Of course, epistemologists will seek to clarify the meaning of religious statements, but as I have said, this means clarifying what is already there awaiting such clarification. Philosophy is neither for nor against religion: 'it leaves everything as it is'. This fact distinguishes philosophy from apologetics. It is not the task of the philosopher to decide whether there is a God or not, but to ask what it means to affirm or deny the existence of God.[16]

[16] D. Z. Phillips, *The Concept of Prayer* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968), p. 10. I took the quote from this book on purpose since it belongs to the early stage reflections of Phillips's position. His later stage writings are, of course, more elaborate and more outspoken when it comes to the explication of his antirealistic position. The leitmotif, nevertheless, stays the same.

Admittedly, certain aspects in Phillips's writings tend sometimes towards irrealism with regard to very specific commitments – take for instance the concept of prayer as the idea of asking or begging God for something – but it would be way too harsh to say that Phillips is an irrealist regarding the existence of God. In many of his writings he reflected on the question of what will follow for us once we agree that there is no unequivocal notion of existence so that God's existence cannot be asserted and justified on the same basis as sentences which affirm the existence of electrons, dinosaurs or genes. In the way Phillips approached the problem, religious anti-realism starts with the most fundamental insight that 'to exist' and 'to be real' and other phrases of this kind are extremely sensitive with regard to the subject they are predicated from. Furthermore, none of those phrases are interchangeable. In order to find out what we mean by those phrases we have to take a look at the context of meaningful communication – a context in which especially our actions in combination with our linguistic behaviour reveal the specific meaning of existence-claims. Within this framework an antirealist reconstruction of the ontological argument (as famously proposed by Rush Rhees) might be developed out of the idea that one doesn't understand the meaning and impact of the word 'God' as the 'Id Quo Maius Cogitari Nequit', if one pretends to have understood the meaning of 'God' as the IQMCN and simultaneously claims the non-existence of God. As a matter of fact, Phillips's position is not so much that of anti-realism, let alone irrealism, but rather an attack on naïve religious realism and an attack on philosophies that, in the name of an overall applicable realism, are willing to oppose theism on a, as they pretend to do, purely scientific basis.

Now let us turn to our second example: Gordon Kaufman. In his classic monograph *God: The Problem*, he introduces what we need to call religious quasi-realism since we find an apophatic overtone in his message. As a conclusion he presents the idea that the word 'God' is a symbol:

> The word 'God' not only designates a transcendent reality never accessible to our observation or even our speculation; it also implies an ordering of the world in personalized and purposive terms. Though God himself may escape our every attempt to search him out, the world that we can and do experience can be apprehended as his. That is, we can perceive it and live in it as created by God and ordered to his purposes, though we may not be able to prove either that this is in fact true of the world or that God does himself exist.

> The matter may be compared to the convergence of a number of main highways toward a city lying some distance off the map. There is an order in the converging lines which can be clearly perceived, but the ground and center of that order (the point of intersection) is not open to view. We can, if we choose, orient ourselves and our travels by reference to the supposed city off the edge of the map, even though we have no further chart that actually shows that the city is there or just what are its contours and character.[17]

This analogy is as revealing as helpful since it tells us that Kaufman is in one way or the other bothered with factualism; and indeed factualism is what nourishes Kaufman's version of quasi-realism. We can give his main intuitions the following argumentative outline:

i. The reference of a proper name is not problematic if and only if the referent is a distinguishable object located in time and space.
ii. The referent of the word 'God' is not located in time and space.
iii. Thus, the reference of the proper name 'God' is problematic.

From iii. Kaufman derives the insight that it is necessary for us to treat the word 'God' not as a proper name at all (but as a symbol). The hidden agenda of anti-factualism becomes obvious once we replace key phrases like 'proper name' with 'sentence', 'referent' with 'truthmaker' and the 'location in space and time' with '(empirical) state of affairs'. It is now easy to see why Kaufman offers religious quasi-realism as a way out: He gives credit to the more or less positivist doctrine which assumes that some main constituents of states of affairs need to be entities that are embedded in space and time. Of course, Kaufman does not want to give up the rationality of religious language and the business of theology, which is connected to it. Therefore, a detour seems to be necessary: Given that our actions and our behaviour are seated in space and time, God-talk becomes relevant once it is reconstructed in a way that makes the connection between the symbol and our actions obvious. There are no physical states of affairs that are immediate truthmakers of sentences containing the word 'God' in an affirmative sense; but they are indirectly important insofar as they enter as facts into human actions and behaviour. Of course, the easiest philosophical answer to that would be to say that Kaufman's initial premise is wrong and that his notion of

[17] Gordon D. Kaufman, *God: The Problem* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), pp. 96-97.

facts gives a restricted version of factualism too much credit. So – is that all there is to religious quasi-realism?

For Kaufman, quasi-realism has two main advantages: If it is combined with some straightforward concept of anti-realism, the claims of factualism can themselves be remodelled in anti-realistic terms, i.e. they belong to a certain worldview which rests on human conceptualizations and constructions.[18] Furthermore, anti-realism may be the engine that keeps a critical hermeneutics of religious imagery going. If we regard a large number of traditional concepts of God as results of human means of conceptualization, we might feel entitled to critically review those images and even replace them. But such a replacement couldn't be successful, if the premise of every interpretation of religious language was irrealism. Only by believing in an ultimate reality does a reform of our concepts of God make sense:

> If God is understood as the serendipitous creativity manifest throughout the cosmos – instead of as a cosmic person – and we humans are understood as deeply embedded in, and basically sustained by, this creative activity in and through the web of life on planet Earth, we will be strongly encouraged to develop attitudes and to participate in activities that fit properly into this web of living creativity [...].[19]

It is open for discussion whether or not Kaufman's ultimate concept of God (which itself is the product of some sort of Ecoliberation Theology) might turn into irrealism or not. For our present goal it is enough to see that religious quasi-realism as the justification of critical hermeneutics will provoke almost naturally a theological opposition. But is this party that resides at the other side of the spectrum really opposed to quasi-realism?[20] Again, most of the time religious irrealism seems to be the danger many want to avoid right from the start in eradicating every form of anti-realism.

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[18] Cf. Gordon D. Kaufman, *God: The Problem*, pp. 203-225.

[19] Gordon D. Kaufman, 'Mystery, God, and Constructivism', in *Realism and Religion: Philosophical and Theological Perspectives*, ed. by Andrew Moore and Michael Scott (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 11-29, esp. 27.

[20] Sometimes, indeed, it is irrealism which is under attack. And some other times it is what one usually calls 'constructivism' (usually including a rather odd notion of constructivism). An interesting example is Katherine Sonderegger, 'The Character of Christian Realism', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 57 (2004), 451-465, who directly confronts realism and anti-realism based on the claim that an idea of a mind-dependent reality is untenable. Nevertheless, it is interesting to see that the author is not engaging in an argument here but simply claims that one must accept realism, cf. ibid., p. 452.

Let us turn finally to our last example usually assessed as a version of religious/theological anti-realism. In John Hick's *Interpreting Religion* we find the idea that the ultimate reality is beyond the scope of our knowledge and understanding[21] so that most, if not all, of the religious expressions we encounter turn out to be more or less adequate symbolizations meant to deal with an ultimate that cannot be approached. It is crystal clear that Hick's philosophy of religion sticks to metaphysical realism when it comes to the existence of the ultimate.[22] But, what about the rest? A closer look will show that Hick's approach is a version of negative theology, since he strictly denies that religious expressions can be taken literally because of our lack of knowledge. The structure of his argument can be pinned down in the following way:

(1) Reliably assertive sentences, which are open to truth-evaluation, presuppose sufficient knowledge of the entity the sentences are meant to refer to.
(2) We do not have sufficient knowledge of God, since God as the ultimate reality is beyond any means of gaining knowledge.
(3) The required presuppositions of assertive religious language cannot be fulfilled.

We may question the connection between sufficient knowledge and reliable assertion right from the start, while saying that reasonable belief will do. Still, this argument does not support religious anti-realism directly although it may well be said that some sort of *expressivism* fits perfectly into this picture. But this is just a contrastive expressivism, which is not applicable to the very existence of the ultimate itself. Additionally, *theological quasi-realism* might fit this picture as well: If Hick's epistemology forces us to steer away from any form of causal theory of linguistic reference, religious language needs to be based on a different foundation. The Wittgensteinian idea of language as a rule-governed enterprise comes in sight and would render theology a hermeneutical science occupied with the unfolding and explication of the rules in question.[23] But, obviously the resulting version of quasi-realism coming from this merger between Hick and Wittgenstein is by no

[21] Cf. John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion* (London: Macmillan, 1989).

[22] Cf. Roger Trigg, 'Realism and Antirealism', in *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, ed. by Philip L. Quinn and Charles Taliaferro (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), pp. 213-220, esp. 218-219.

[23] Cf. Andrew Moore, *Realism and Christian Faith*, pp. 75-79.

means fictionalistic because a fictionalist assessment would presuppose a view from above which, according to Hick and Wittgenstein, we don't have. Furthermore, rules of language have an objective status although it makes no sense to ask whether or not they can be ratified by certain truthmakers.

III. A MIND-DEPENDENT REALITY

After this brief overview over different versions and flavours of anti-realism we need to get our head around the quintessential *mind-dependency thesis*. Before we open the door for two strains of arguments, we need to take a closer look at some serious attacks on religious anti-realism. These attacks did not originate from the realistic camp but come from philosophers that are, to a certain extent, sympathetic to anti-realism (at least in specific areas). The first attack says that anti-realism is just too easy a way for religious commitments to weasel away from the ontological and epistemological burden of proof. In a scarcely cloaked cynical manner Simon Blackburn underlines that religion cannot keep up its demands and obligations if its language is reconstructed predominantly in an anti-realistic way as a system of symbolic language and performative rites.[24]

The second attack comes from philosophy of science indicating that religious and theological anti-realists have underestimated the returning strength of scientific realism and should, for their own good, deal with the question of whether or not theism has any explanatory power and whether or not it is necessary to treat God like a theoretical entity in natural sciences. This attack continues to say that any kind of scientific anti-realism that takes scientific progress as a litmus test for the performance of sciences must stick to the criterion of the explanatory power of an entity whose existence is uncertain but whose treatment 'as if it existed' is validated by its explanatory role. Otherwise this endorsement of anti-realism would fall prey to the problems the first attack indicated: it would be too easy a way out of the forces of theistic scepticism and atheism. Both attacks reflect a strategy well known in the philosophy of religion: They want religious assertions to be interpreted

[24] Cf. Simon Blackburn, 'Religion and Ontology', in *Realism and Religion* (see footnote 19), pp. 47-59, esp. 56-59.

realistically in order to open them to evidentialist scrutiny and atheistic criticism.[25]

What can we say about those attacks? Andrew Moore votes for a big separation between the endeavour of science and the aims of religion and religious language.[26] While the former is literally tied to the explanation of phenomena in the universe, the latter's business is to see the world in a specific light, which for Andrew Moore is the light of revelation.[27] Therefore, religious systems cannot be compared to scientific theories and the crucial role of certain entities, whose existence seemed to be postulated by religious systems, is not that of theoretical entities living up to the standards of best explanations.[28] Furthermore, Moore adds that religious or theological realism is under a lot of pressure itself, since – once the explanatory role of religion is conceded – it unavoidably starts competing with scientific theories with respect to the explanation of certain phenomena (like religious experience and other things one could take as indications for the existence of God).[29]

In addition to what Moore has pointed out, we can add two more observations regarding the advantages of religious anti-realism: First of all, revelation is a concept that is, by all means, mind-dependent. In

[25] Cf. Alexander Bird, 'Scientific and Theological Realism', in *Realism and Religion* (see footnote 19), pp. 61-81, esp. 67-79.

[26] Although I am in favour of this separation there might still remain some interesting parallels that are useful in describing what we mean by religious anti-realism. Take, for instance, the problem of under-determined scientific theories and the case in which two equally solid theories are consistent with the phenomena but, after all, we cannot decide whether one or the other is true (or in any meaningful way privileged over the other). This case can be construed as an argument in favour of anti-realism. Cf. Lars Bergström, 'Underdetermination and Realism', *Erkenntnis*, 21 (1984), 349-365. The analogy could help us to see how different religious worldviews (although they do not have the status of theories, of course) are in accordance with the phenomena; but yet we may not be able to decide which one is true.

[27] Cf. Andrew Moore, *Realism and Christian Faith*, pp. 45-55.

[28] Cf. Andrew Moore, *Realism and Christian Faith*, p. 66: 'I suggest that when they speak of God's unobservability, theological realists make a category mistake by transferring the "grammar" of observation in the created realm to the creator. In the realm of created reality with which science deals, the "grammar" of observation implies practices such as prediction, experimental control, and – if we are realist – the ascription of truth to theories; by contrast, the "grammar" of theology involves believing and obedience. Thus I shall argue that though there is a sense in which it is proper to speak of God's revelation as his making himself observable, this is not a making visible in the same sense in which electron microscopes make, say, genes visible.'

[29] Ibid., p. 56.

a universe without rational subjects and without consciousness there could be no revelation. Additionally, from a purely epistemological and hermeneutical angle, revelation is a way of interpretation: treating certain texts or events as a measure of the encounter with the divine while those texts or events do not offer any proof of their divine origin that is beyond reasonable doubt. The history of the critique of religion may teach us that there is not a single text in any religious tradition whose existence and content cannot alternatively be explained in purely naturalistic terms (even if those explanations should require some acrobatic skills from the critic); the same goes for certain events that are assessed as normative and revelatory by a certain religious tradition. What religious anti-realism adds to the equation is what we should call the irreplaceable premise of faith. In the light of faith, which at least partially has to be reconstructed in doxastic and epistemic terms, the concept of revelation makes sense. In the light of faith we treat certain texts of events as if they were revealed although we are in no position to leave behind the interpretational help this concept is offering us whenever we reflect on the content and extension of revelation. The reality of revelation is that very concept which serves as an irreplaceable tool to evaluate events or texts under the perspective of faith. To explain why this is tied to antirealism we can make use of what Hilary Putnam famously used as a starting point for his idea of internal realism: the distinction of primary and secondary qualities (as it goes back to Descartes and is found in a number of empiricist writers). Even if we might have to admit that there is no evidence for a complete disjunction of primary and secondary qualities parallel to the distinction between mind-independent and mind-dependent properties, we would still be left with the troubling question of whether or not there are religiously significant 'revelatory properties' that somehow supervene on physical properties in a law-like manner. The religious anti-realist would add that there won't be any such revelatory properties 'out there in the world' since revelation is a concept that is meant to help us interpret the world of facts in a certain way.

That this is a crucial point becomes clear once we take a look at Kathrin Sonderegger's version of what she called 'Christian realism'. She says something about the interpretation of Biblical texts and the notion of the universe being God's creation:

> The opening verses of Genesis are an *image* – or better, an *archetype* – of the very nature of reality: that our cosmos exists in relation to God; that

> they belong together; that God is the willing origin of this cosmos; and the proper name for this relation is 'creation' and the proper character of our cosmos is 'creaturely'. Now, there may be recognizable signs of this creatureliness in the cosmos itself: the apostle Paul appeared to think so. But there may not. Proper theological realism does not rest upon the claim that reality as created must show forth its creatureliness apart from Christian faith: Christian realism is not 'mind or language independent' in that sense. Rather, the true character of our cosmos is revealed and depicted in the beginning of scripture; and the true character of the Almighty as creator is exemplified there. Proper Christian realism begins with these two themes.[30]

Of course, one can have a realistic notion of creation. Maybe this is the case if you try to find a rock-solid basis for the cosmological argument. But, of course there is also the possibility, even the need for an anti-realistic notion of creation. This one is in place whenever we add the premise of faith to our interpretation of facts – especially when the summation of facts results in a still underdetermined picture of the world. Sonderegger's interpretation of the cosmos as God's creation is precisely a version of an anti-realistic notion of creation. There is nothing wrong with that. But it sounds like muddying the waters if one calls that 'realism' – even the addendum 'Christian' won't make that more realistic in a meaningful sense of the word. What Sonderegger seems to aim at is the idea that beyond our symbols and concepts there is still the transcendent reality of God. So, at the end of the day she is concerned with irrealism. This becomes even more apparent when Sonderegger qualifies her version of 'Christian realism' in ways that eventually resemble the characteristics of anti-realism:

> Christian realism is not, in fact, a method and position as constructivism is. Realism is not the starting point or axiom that construction is; nor is it an epistemic or metaphysical theory. Christian realism is not a theory at all. Rather, it is something deeper, more primal, formative and indispensable than any theory or method could be. We might call it a 'form of life' if Wittgenstein's term did not, ironically, signal irrealism to many commentators; and we might call it a 'picture' or 'characterization' should these terms, too, not appear to connote imagination or wish. We might call it *consensus gentium* (the consensus of the people), should

[30] Katherine Sonderegger, 'The Character of Christian Realism', p. 456.

> that term of protestant scholasticism not suggest to *us* a wish rather than an acknowledgement; or 'marks', as of the true church, should that term not be so enmeshed in confessional polemics. It may well be that Bishop Butler's aphorism – that every thing is what it is and not another thing – applies to realism as well: we cannot state it fully or precisely in any other terms. So G. E. Moore viewed the 'good': it was both transcendent and primitive. The real is surely that, if anything deserves that claim. So Christian realism is 'common-sense', 'rule of thumb', ordinary or 'close at hand'. It is pre-theoretical – if that did not sound so theory-laden – or the 'given' – if that were not even more theorybound from Kant forward. Christian realism is the reception of the world, the real world. Nothing less question-begging than that can be said.[31]

Maybe what Sonderegger seeks to emphasize is that the Christian worldview *is basic* in the sense that we do not have to sit down and develop a theory about the world wondering whether and how we can privilege this theory over and above a rivalling one. Maybe she thinks that a certain worldview – like the Christian one – emerges out of natural inclinations and not out of voluntary and deliberate consensus. Still, this doesn't count against the mind-dependency thesis which is couched in the 'premise of faith' that elucidates a certain religious worldview.

The second addition (which might help us to see the advantages of religious anti-realism) stems from Mark McLeod. It basically says that anti-realism can tolerate and bear contradictions without the goal to overcome these contradictions at the earliest convenience.[32] Thus, a religious-antirealist might be willing to name the difference between a theistic and a naturalistic worldview, but she could live with a situation in which none of these competing systems or languages can be evidentially proven to be the only legitimate 'description' of the world. Given that there are certain convictions that turn into the concepts that we use to explain or interpret the facts around us, the differences between a naturalistic and a theistic worldview may turn out to be beyond dissolution in case the concepts in question have a pre-rational origin. In short: Anti-realism is a way to deal with contradictions in presenting what we could call a Goodman-world (or, to use another phrase, a holistic worldview) in which each of the claims is well established and in keeping these worlds

[31] Ibid., pp. 452-453.

[32] Cf. Mark McLeod, 'Realism and Irrealism: A Dialogue', in *Realism and Antirealism* (see footnote 11), pp. 26-40, esp. 30.

separate by showing that an overarching Goodman-world or worldview is out of sight.

In a methodologically more transparent way, McLeod's hints were foreshadowed by Immanuel Kant. In his *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* he keeps the most noble thoughts of special metaphysics as 'regulative ideas' of pure reason[33] – ideas reason is desperately in need of for its own sake. It is because of the underlying concept of a higher unity that these regulative ideas are so needed: The unity of the self in order to have an enduring and stable bearer of all thoughts and concepts,[34] the unity of the world in order to have the order and the framework for the objects of experience to be given, and above all the unity of mind and world – given in the notion of God – in order to have a higher synthesis which eventually correlates mind and world. On the other hand, Kant tries to show that we literally run into dead ends once we try to find evidence for what is indicated in these ideas on the basis of facts that are presented by experience. Based on facts we cannot decide whether there is a stable and enduring subject of experience. Based on facts we cannot decide whether or not there is a whole world ordered and given to us that allows us to experience it and act freely in it.[35] And based on facts alone we cannot say whether or not there is a higher government and the ultimate cause of the world we call God.[36] Additionally, we run into the problems of contradiction. If we follow Kant, the notions of freedom and the idea of the causal closure of the world are incompatible but yet equally needed to understand the moral order on the one hand and the order of events in the world on the other. There is a contradiction here, which cannot be eliminated based on the rivalling concepts that are in place. So, the only way is to embrace anti-realism. But, especially the example of freedom shows that, for Kant, the concept we embrace as if it were real is not a fiction (in any inferior sense) but something objective that gets its normative status because we cannot avoid conceiving of us as free if we want to have a consistent understanding of the depth and moral dignity of our actions.[37] Thus, from a certain perspective we must conceive of ourselves as being free and responsible agents. But from another perspective (especially when we need to take a look at the world

[33] Cf. Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, AA 330-335.
[34] Cf. Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, AA 262-270.
[35] Cf. Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, AA 309-314.
[36] Cf. Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, AA 315-321.
[37] Cf. Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, AA 366-368.

from a naturalistic point of view), we must treat mundane events as if they were parts of an entirely closed causal chain. Anti-realism is the only way out if we cannot set aside one concept from the other.

We can expand Kant's anti-realism even to concepts that are needed in theology;[38] take for instance the problem of divine foreknowledge and human freedom. Imitating Kant's style we could say that both concepts are an unavoidable and integral part of a religious worldview: The idea of divine foreknowledge keeps God's supreme sovereignty intact theologically and offers also a pillar stone of spirituality. If everything is foreknown by God, nothing is alien to him and everything there will be is already in his hands. Nevertheless, this idea puts a heavy burden on the concept of the openness of the future, which seems to be a prerequisite for (morally meaningful) human freedom. Thus, we cannot take away the idea of future events being not yet actual and us having a major influence on the course of the world that lies ahead of us. If contradiction is unavoidable and resolvable only at the cost of abandoning one or the other concept, antirealism offers a helping hand: We are in a position to say that the contradictions that seem to fall upon us theologically (and even spiritually) are merely conceptual and that we are entitled to stick to both concepts or ideas as if they were true if we can show that these concepts are needed for the sanity of reason, the coherence of our actions, the integrity of our most fundamental convictions that contain the rulebook of our discursive commitments and so on.

Don Cupitt alludes to this very Kantian problem of the contradictions that might arise from irreplaceable but yet incompatible concepts of God:

> [T]raditional theism makes three claims, as follows:
> (*i*) God is active;
> (*ii*) God is immutable; and
> (*iii*) God is in this life known only through his effects.
>
> How can these three claims be reconciled? It would seem that if an account of God must be such that these three things can all be said of him, then something like our own account has to be given. For on our account God is not really a person or a substance but [...] an unconditionally demanding and inflexible principle which as we choose it and lay it upon ourselves generates certain effects within us; theistic faith, the drama of the spiritual life and so on.[39]

[38] For a Kantian lead, cf. Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, AA 457-461.
[39] Don Cupitt, *Taking Leave of God*, p. 102f.

Cupitt's conclusion sounds admittedly like fictionalism. And we have to discuss the question of whether interpretation as some sort of construction entails fictionalism. However, we can start with Cupitt's diagnosis of realistic theism and come up with a more Kantian solution: If for the sanity of reason and for the coherence of our moral and spiritual actions we need to think of God being active as well as of God being immutable, etc., and if those concepts turn out to be incompatible (especially when we take them at face value), we need to treat them as regulative ideas that reveal their indispensability by the means in which they orient our lives.

Regulative ideas are of course mind-dependent because they crucially emerge from the activities of reason, especially from the inner dynamics of the cognitive powers of reason and its aim to find order and consistency. Regulative ideas depend upon what we think cannot be thought otherwise; from here they gain their objectivity. Nevertheless, the world as sum of facts remains quite ambiguous once we try to identify the truthmakers of these ideas out there in the world. We establish the regulative ideas – including the idea of God – as if they were true[40] still being aware that there won't be any truthmakers available apart from our thinking. The ambiguity of the facts won't go away – especially not once we raise the big questions about freedom, the substantiality of the self, the order of the world, the ultimate aim of the world, and God. But based on how reason itself performs we embrace those concepts as ideas that in the end govern how we *interpret* the facts and how we approach the world. From a Kantian perspective we can embed the premise of faith into the premises of ultimate concepts that emerge out of reason's dynamics towards the ultimate – having nothing but reason itself as their truthmaker.

IV. RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCES AND THEIR INTERPRETATION

But maybe the above-mentioned mixture of Kant with Cupitt is too much for the contemporary taste in philosophy of religion. The realistic opponent may still deny that a Kantian analysis which is combined with the notion of ambiguity of what we perceive to be factual is correct and convincing. Still, the opponent might want to see a convincing argument that helps her to see why anti-realism is the best we can get. Maybe one

[40] Cf. Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, AA 412-413.

argument can help us out here, which could be called the argument from religious experience. The result might not be global anti-realism but, at least, a regional form of anti-realism which is still strong enough to be taken seriously.

Of course, it is too global a question whether an adequate notion of experience as such leads to anti-realism. Even if we want to avoid the two horns of the dilemma which a prima-facie reconstruction of experience might have in store for us, namely the *myth of the given*[41] on the one hand and detached coherentism on the other, a McDowellian solution to the problem, which consists in affirming that experience is as rational as it is conceptual, starting with the conceptual aspects of our openness for experience and their possible impact on the rational status of our convictions,[42] won't do for religious experience. There are too many loose ends in that very specific story since a huge variety of phenomena can serve as the experiential input to which an articulation of religious experiences is the result and since there is, strictly speaking, no specific input that could ever necessitate the articulation of religious experiences.[43] Of course, there have been attempts to show that certain inputs will trigger certain religious propositions – take for instance Alvin Plantinga's Warranted Christian Belief; however such concepts are far from having established convincingly that a *Conformity Principle of Perception* (CPP), which holds that certain specific inputs will trigger certain propositions in every possible world that is inhabited by rational beings similar to us, is applicable to religious experiences. Since Plantinga sticks to (CPP) in one way or the other, the multitude of religious symbols and expressions, to his view, has to be traced back to severe malfunctions of certain

[41] For the discussion of an intimate connection between the *myth of the given* and metaphysical realism see Raimo Tuomela, 'The Myth of the Given and Realism' (see footnote 12).

[42] This is how Richard Schantz reformulates McDowell's position with regard to the problem of experience as merely being the cause of certain convictions. Cf. Richard Schantz, 'Wahrnehmung und Welt', in *Wirklichkeit und Wahrnehmung des Heiligen, Schönen, Guten*: *Neue Beiträge zur Realismusdebatte*, ed. by Elisabeth Heinrich and Dieter Schönecker (Paderborn: Mentis, 2011), pp. 17-37, esp. 32-34, referring to John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 14-18, 137-147.

[43] For further discussion on whether or not certain concepts of religious experience lead to anti-realism see Winfried Löffler, 'Die Rolle religiöser Erfahrung bei Swinburne, Plantinga und Alston', in *Wirklichkeit und Wahrnehmung des Heiligen, Schönen und Guten* (see footnote 42), pp. 67-123.

cognitive powers. But, actually, he is in no position to show why – for instance – Christian expressions of religious experiences are not equally subject to suspicion as are the outcomes of other, non-Christian religious traditions. His concept remains unavoidably hypothetical, even ad-hoc at that point.[44]

If we do not focus on the rather rare occasions of a more or less direct encounter with the ultimate (as some claim for mystical experiences) but on patterns of a more common way to introduce religious experience to the epistemology of religious belief we cannot take away the necessity of interpretation: Why is it that the night sky or the impressive skyline of the Bavarian Alps inspire our sense of wonder and grandeur, and eventually lead to religious expressions? And why is it that some people might agree with our religious expression – based on the very same signs –whilst another might not? The case of religious expressions which are based on certain experiences cannot be compared to everyday sense perception – even if an element of interpretation is still in place presumably at the most basic level of perception: Why is it that we all of a sudden interpret the appearance of a group of people as the appearance of the Simpson family, for instance, and not as the appearance of Homer, Marge and their kids? Why is it that we see something as a townhouse instead of a two story building?[45] But maybe nothing depends on those differences in interpreting something as something based on the concepts we have that rest on the convictions we share. In the case of religious experience, however, differences become crucial; they might accumulate to the point of disagreement while the disagreement cannot be settled on the ground that one interpretation of an event is true while the other is not. Let us take, for example, a less ambitious and more common event – like the glowing of a mountain top during sunset. Based on the *premise of faith* and the concepts that come with it, a religious person is motivated and justified in interpreting this event as a sign of the creator's beauty given as gift to creation. But, equally, a non-religious person would be motivated

[44] For further discussions see Thomas Schärtl, *Glaubens-Überzeugung. Philosophische Bemerkungen zur Erkenntnistheorie des christlichen Glaubens* (Münster: Aschendorff, 2007), pp. 237-256.

[45] For the German philosopher Günter Abel, the fact that even the most basic forms of experience are immersed in interpretation makes interpretation itself basic and unavoidable – with interesting consequences for metaphysical realism; cf. Günter Abel, *Interpretations-Welten: Gegenwartsphilosophie jenseits von Essentialismus und Relativismus* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1995), pp. 448f.

and even justified to see the glowing mountain just a spectacular event provided by the central star of our solar system. Religious experiences resemble experiences of beauty insofar as we are free to 'have' them – free not just in a voluntary sense but also in the sense of being free from an epistemic duty to see something *as* something. But perhaps some are inclined to think that this account of religious experience, which always leaves the door open for legitimate engagement or disengagement in interpretation, is too liberal a way of conceiving of religious experiences. However, the outlined aspects of freedom of interpretation cohere with the doxastic freedom that belongs essentially to religious beliefs. Especially from a theistic point of view, which sees faith as the initial step the finite creature takes in order to engage into a partnership with the divine beneficiary, the freedom of faith must remain an irreplaceable requirement. But if it is equally legitimate to interpret an event as a religious experience and if it also legitimate to not interpret it that way, we are left with contradictions unless we embrace anti-realism again.

Not just religious experiences but also religious symbols are an integral part of a religious worldview. But religious qualities of events or things do not supervene on the physical properties of things and facts in a lawlike manner that can be logically pictured by a necessary implication. Pretty much everything can be filled with religious meaning while those who do not share certain concepts or do not add the premise of faith won't detect anything meaningful.[46]

It may be the case that events and things offer something like a basic meaning they are at least opened up for (and this idea is highly disputable, but – for the time being – we might concede the notion of a basic meaning to the realist). Whether or not this is the case becomes quite irrelevant once we consider that religious meaning is placed at a second-order-level of giving meaning to things at events. Of course, there still might be first-order-meaning in religious contexts, maybe the existence of God or some instances of direct encounter of God (although in Kant and Wittgenstein we will find the idea that it is rather illusory to interpret the existence of God as a case of first-order-meaning of things or events) can be exemptions. But the richness of a religious worldview is not built upon the rather sparse confession that a God exists and some people have encountered him. Rather the richness of a religious

[46] Cf. Joseph Runzo, *World Views and Perceiving God* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), pp. 67-93, 115-141.

worldview depends on the many instances in which we ascribe (second-order-)meaning to things and events: Events can become the answer to a prayer because I *see* them *like* that while nothing in their mundane and physical layout dictates to treat them like an answer to my prayer. In a much larger scale the homecoming of Israel after the exile can be seen as an act of God although nothing in the physical and political layout of those events points to supernatural powers; in a non-religious worldview events like that can be traced back to rather mundane causes like the powers that be which somehow change their minds or select different political aims while setting those free that might have been under the burden of previous aims. Again, the premise of faith and the religious concepts we have guide our interpretation.

Perhaps not in every respect but for the most parts of religious worldviews we can say that they rest on acts of constructing a worldview. The term 'construction' has a very bad reputation because it insinuates that we make things up that have no basis 'in reality' or make an interpretation out of thin air. But we shouldn't be appalled by the phrase when something deeper is concerned: Interpretation is an act; it is simultaneously receptive and creative. Especially at the level of second-order-meanings the creative aspect outweighs the receptive aspect, although both aspects cannot be separated. Thus, we add interpretation to something, although this addition cannot be 'clinically' separated from what we try to interpret. The interpretation is like the light we need to see that Gestalt[47] of facts – a Gestalt we attribute to the facts based on how we actively see the facts. The Gestalt that emerges is nothing that is not permitted by the facts or things we focus on; it has to be in accordance with them. But, nevertheless, the Gestalt is an entity that gets its life from the relation we establish to things and facts by interpretation. In underlining the active side of interpretation and the mind-dependency of Gestalt we might as well call interpretation an act or a construction. Of course, in drawing a parallel between interpretation and construction we must not think that interpretation is up for a pure decision or

[47] I am using the phrase 'Gestalt' in a way Hans Urs von Balthasar has introduced this phrase to theological discourse. Cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Herrlichkeit*, Vol. 1: *Schau der Gestalt* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1988). In short, it should be treated as an abbreviation to underline the fact that in seeing something we see something as something. In using this phrase I want to allude to the fact that there are only degrees that turn the case that two persons see something *differently* into the case when two persons see something *different*.

depends on a consensus or is open to the powers of the highest bidder. That is not how interpretation works. Nevertheless, interpretations are parts of what Wittgenstein would have called *forms of life* – patterns of communication we share with each other (even at a subconscious, pre-rational level). If engaging in communication and if using the patterns of communication that we have established in our forms of life can be seen as acting, we may be justified in underlining the pro-active, constructive side of communication.

V. SEARCHING FOR A BROADER PERSPECTIVE

Maybe the above sketched remarks on antirealism are still premature. And maybe those positions are more accurate which think that the controversy as such indicates a premature framework of thinking, so that – at the end – the solution of the debate is the dissolution of the premises that lead to the controversy in question.

From this angle, it makes sense to regard Wittgenstein's view as a subtle paradigm that criticizes the very presuppositions of this debate and which tries to resolve the problems attached to the controversy in question from 'within'[48] (i.e. from within the execution of knowledge and the performances that language enables us to do). Seeing Wittgenstein as a role-model for overcoming the presuppositions of the controversy as such makes his view comparable even to Hegel who, in a speculative thread of mastery, tried to resolve the realism/antirealism-controversy from above as well as from below. Although it is not possible to chart all the consequences this approach has for the philosophy of religion, the Wittgenstein-Hegel alliance might serve as a silent warning or as a very strong reminder that the much invoked criterion of mind-independence is not in itself easy to grasp, let alone to describe and might eventually turn out to be devoid of meaning.

For in Wittgenstein as in Hegel we find an interpretation of mind-dependence that makes semantics and thinking the *cement of the*

[48] For a non-Wittgensteinian undermining of the realism/antirealism controversy compare Werner Stegmeier, 'Diesseits von Realismus und Anti-Realismus: Die Realität der Orientierung', in *Wirklichkeit und Wahrnehmung des Heiligen* (see footnote 42), pp. 39-63. Werner Stegmeier's approach is predominantly hermeneutical and semiotic. What is very interesting about his solution is the positive role played by reasoning and justification which actually shows that one can steer away from metaphysical realism without giving up the ideals of objectivity and cognitivity.

universe – in a way that would render any concept of mind-independent reality truly useless and, even more so, meaningless.[49] Their argument for attacking the realist's concept of mind-independence would come down to the following (admittedly somewhat *oversimplified*) conclusion:

(1) If any answer to any question of existence depends crucially on our approach to what we think reality to be (like), there is no answer to questions of existence independent of the mind. [*Premise*]
(2) Anything we think reality to be (like) depends crucially on our approach to reality. [*Premise*]
(3) There is no meaningful answer to questions of existence independent of the mind. [From 1 & 2, MP]

Of course the crucial premise is sentence 2). It would take another paper to get into the details of how Wittgenstein and Hegel might really justify this courageous premise. Some hints might suffice: Wittgenstein would point out that existence-statements (as any statements) are certain types of predication – which are, by the way, always in danger of being messed up with regular predications – and that predicating is by itself a type of language game that is governed by the structures of our language. However, it would be misconceived, according to Wittgenstein, to call this 'interpretation' since what we do in language is not just an addition to whatever we get in perceiving reality but is the way how perceiving works at any rate. These structures, Wittgenstein would add, are determined predominantly, if not exclusively, by our actions and the patterns of our communicative behaviour and not by certain facts reality might consist of – independently of our approach to reality and independently of our actions and behaviour.[50] Nevertheless, these structures are not something that is thrown on reality like a net we use to capture the fish of experience (this might be a rather Kantian notion of epistemology) but emerge, so to speak, out of reality itself, since our actions and patterns of communication are integral parts of reality and cannot be separated antiseptically from what counts as objective reality 'as such'. For, if we

[49] I am grateful to Florian Rieger for a number of substantial discussions on Wittgenstein and Hegel. The point of comparison can be found in the major topics discussed in the *Philosophical Investigations* on the one hand and in the *Wissenschaft der Logik* on the other.

[50] Cf. Gordon P. Baker and Peter M. S. Hacker, *Wittgenstein: Rules, Grammar and Necessity*: *An Analytic Commentary on the Philosophical Investigations*, Vol. 2 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988).

look for the pure 'as such' of reality apart from what our language does for addressing reality, we will end up empty-handed.

Hegel's view, in contrast, is rather multi-layered. But in his *Phenomenology of the Spirit* we find quite a number of initial hints that support premise 2) while turning the mind-independency-thesis from heads to tails: Hegel emphasizes, for instance, that no entity has an identity and thus can be approached as the individual instantiation of a universal without a necessary relation to consciousness and self-consciousness. The way Hegel discusses these issues suggests that in a world without consciousness a significant account of identity and thisness would be impossible, since identity crucially depends on a mind's capacity to identify something *as something* and since thisness depends on a consciousness's ability to refer to something as something.[51] But this is just one side of the story: It is as well the activity of the mind executed as consciousness and self-consciousness that provides entities with individuality, identity and thisness as it is the entity's own substantiality which grants individuality and thisness. To say so is, indeed, applied dialectics which has the goal to overcome the unhealthy separation of reality and consciousness. Since the mind-dependency-thesis as well as the independency-thesis presuppose a dyadic relation between the mind and the world, it is Hegel's aim to undermine this very relation in emphasizing that there are no such hemispheres that could be separated antiseptically in ways that make the dyadic relation work. Therefore, whatever makes an entity an individual or a substance is exactly what echoes within consciousness as the conceptually graspable essence of this very entity.

A consequence of both views might be to either abandon *truthmaker talk* (in a deflationist way) or to open *truthmaker talk* up to the idea that not only states of affairs but also substances, relations, properties and universals, and concepts can serve as truthmakers and can, therefore, constitute facts (seen as obtaining states of affairs in the broadest sense).

[51] Cf. for instance Georg W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1988), p. 89: 'Es fällt hiermit das letzte Insofern hinweg, welches das für sich Sein und das Sein für anderes trennte; der Gegenstand ist vielmehr in einer und derselben Rücksicht das Gegenteil seiner selbst; für sich, insofern er für anderes, und für anderes, insofern er für sich ist. Er ist für sich, in sich reflektiert, Eins; aber dies für sich, in sich reflektiert, Ein Sein ist mit seinem Gegenteile, dem Sein für ein anderes, in einer Einheit, und darum nur als Aufgehobenes gesetzt; oder dies für sich Sein ist eben so unwesentlich, als dasjenige, was allein das Unwesentliche sein sollte, nämlich das Verhältnis zu anderem.'

Therefore, any notion of reference that is more or less bound to the model of naming spatiotemporal things leads us astray once we raise truthmaker questions enclosed in questions of reference. Moreover, at least for Hegel, truth is a matter of revealing the conceptual side of states of affairs – which could be translated into the idea that states of affairs can serve as truthmakers only once they are seen as instantiations of universals that already serve as a bridge between the mind and the world. In a more sober way Wittgenstein would add that referring is not just one language game among others but a family of games resembling each other. Thus, what counts as a fact depends crucially on the fact-game we are immersed in and the rules we apply. Therefore, the truthmaker-question has to be rephrased into the question of whether the rules that govern our language game are meant to present something as a fact or as a given entity.

To this very brief sketch of Hegel's and Wittgenstein's most fundamental intuitions regarding the realism/antirealism problem, we could as well add a short corollary introducing a more Putnam-like style of reasoning (which is, as it stands, not yet a deductive argument):

(1) If we meaningfully ascribe 'existence' to something, this ascription has to be reformulated in a way that reveals how we epistemically and semantically approach existence.
(2) If we reflect on the ways in which we epistemically or semantically approach existence, we need to treat this as a version of the question of whether or not our concepts are empty.
(3) Concepts are mind-dependent.

It is not the goal of this paper to discuss the above-mentioned line of reasoning; we just should keep it in mind as a kind of warning telling us that the foundations of the realism/antirealism controversy are so tied to the most basic issues in philosophy that it might be appropriate to constantly question the meaning of the key terms involved.

As already noted, it is not so clear what this does for the philosophy of religion. For Hegel we can state that he takes the notion of God as a regulative idea of reasoning and puts it at the very centre of what is meant to be an objective reality which is, nevertheless, mind-dependent insofar as this idea reflects the absolute spirit which encapsulates every mind-gifted existence as such. What religion is dealing with becomes itself part of the self-reflection of this very spirit, and is therefore an objective reality but, of course, not in a mind-independent way. But, actually,

this is not a problem for Hegel since the mind-independency thesis, as pointed out, has lost its grip on us and on the criteria that determine reality. Wittgenstein, on the other hand, could be seen as someone who voluntarily and subtly brackets the idea of an absolute spirit in order to make us aware of the sheer contingency of everything underneath this very idea. And thus, the point of philosophy may turn into a 'religious point of view' (to use Norman Malcolm's[52] famous words) because it makes us aware that no God's eye point of view exists underneath the idea of an absolute spirit – telling us that the realist's desperation, which emerges from aiming at this God's eye point of view without ever getting hold of it, is truly a religious attitude if taken as a reflection of the mark that contingency has put on us.

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[52] Cf. Norman Malcolm, *Wittgenstein: A Religious Point of View* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994).

BUILDING BRIDGES AND CROSSING BOUNDARIES: PHILOSOPHY, THEOLOGY, AND THE INTERRUPTIONS OF TRANSCENDENCE

PHILIP J. ROSSI

Marquette University

Abstract. Discussions about theological realism within analytic philosophy of religion, and the larger conversation between analytic and continental styles in philosophy of religion have generated relatively little interest among Catholic philosophers and theologians; conversely, the work of major figures in recent Catholic theology seems to evoke little interest from analytic philosophers of religion. Using the 1998 papal encyclical on faith and reason, *Fides et ratio*, as a major point of reference, this essay offers a preliminary account of the bases for such seeming mutual indifference and offers some suggestions for future dialogue.

In this essay, I will be offering three points of reference from which to locate current philosophical discussions of theological realism with respect to another set of substantive discussions about the relation between philosophy and theology that have been taking place since the middle of the twentieth century. The goal for doing so is to raise the larger question of how philosophers and theologians representing a range of divergent intellectual traditions can constructively engage one another in mutual conversation. My main focus will be on the discourse and idioms regarding faith, reason, and religion that have been characteristically used by most Catholic philosophers and theologians since at least the late nineteenth century establishment of Thomism as paradigmatic for their inquiry. One of my specific purposes here is to provide an initial account of why these modes of Catholic philosophical and theological inquiry have been, for the most part, more observers (and often not particularly attentive ones) rather than participants in

efforts by analytic and continental philosophers of religion to enter into productive conversation with one another as well as in their concomitant efforts to engage in conversation with theologians. My hope is that the points offered here will indicate that attention to these markers may help to delimit key parts of the larger conceptual and historical territories on which philosophy and theology have engaged – and in some cases failed to engage – one another in 'high modernity' and its aftermath. It will be my suggestion that taking account of the orientations these markers provide upon these Catholic conversations can help to construct pathways leading to an enlarged and, one hopes, more productive encounter between philosophy and theology.

The first marker is Pope John Paul II's encyclical, *Fides et ratio*, 'On the Relationship Between Faith and Reason'. I consider it a fortuitous circumstance that this conference on 'Philosophical Perspectives on Theological Realism' is taking place just a few days prior to the fifteenth anniversary of the publication of this document on September 14, 1998. *Fides et ratio* provides an important basis from which those who, like myself, locate their work within the ambit of the long traditions of Roman Catholic philosophical and theological inquiry may enter into a renewed and perhaps even reconfigured engagement with fundamental questions about the multi-layered set of conceptual, methodological, and historical relations between the two disciplines. As I will propose in more detail later, not the least of the reasons for the significance of *Fides et ratio* as a marker for orienting engagements between philosophy and theology is that it takes further steps along the road that Gerald McCool had described, almost a decade earlier, as leading from 'unity to pluralism' in the internal evolution of the Thomism that had become, by the late nineteenth century, the officially sanctioned benchmark for Roman Catholic philosophical and theological inquiry.[1] In particular, though this document still affirms pride of place to philosophical reflection articulated in continuity with Aquinas's modes of inquiry and thinking, it offers 'room at the table' for other – though not all – modes of philosophical thinking.[2] How much room it allows, and for whom,

[1] Gerald A. McCool, SJ, *From Unity to Pluralism: The Internal Evolution of Thomism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1989).

[2] *Fides et ratio,* § 59, § 74. The former section briefly mentions and commends the views of a number of the philosophers who are then identified by name in the latter section; see also § 76.

remain open questions that have a major bearing how to chart the scope and direction of future conversations between philosophers and theologians that more directly involve modes of discourse and inquiry rooted in these Catholic intellectual traditions.

The second marker is, I suspect, considerably less widely known, though it does bear directly on the conversation between analytic and continental modes of doing philosophy of religion. It comes from a panel discussion that took place at the 1993 Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion, the largest academic society in the English-speaking world for the multi-segmented field of religious studies. This panel was convened to explore the differences between 'philosophy of religion' as it is practiced and presented by two groups of scholars with different primary venues of academic dissemination of their work, one at the annual meetings of the American Academy of Religion, the other at the annual meetings of the American Philosophical Association. The four panel presentations from that session, supplemented by four invited contributions, were subsequently published in a concise volume, still available from Oxford University Press, titled *God, Philosophy, and Academic Culture*.[3] In addition to trying to characterize from a variety of conceptual grids the differences between these two approaches to philosophy of religion – a task complicated by the fact that there are levels of overlap between the two groups – the participants in the discussion also paid some attention to historical and socio-cultural factors in each group that play a role in shaping different styles of argumentation, topics considered of central importance, and views about the function of this field of philosophical inquiry both in the academy and in the wider dynamics of culture.

While there are number of elements in these essays that would be quite useful to explore, there are at least two that I consider particularly significant for my purposes in this essay: the first is that even though the discussants agree that one major difference roughly follows the 'analytic/continental' fault line, that is not the only difference of consequence they identify.[4] The second is that some of those other differences seem to have their source in matters that are *not* extensively discussed in the

[3] Ed. William J. Wainwright (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996).

[4] Philip Quinn's essay, 'The Cultural Anthropology of Philosophy of Religion', pp. 47-57 in *God, Philosophy, and Academic Culture*, imaginatively cast as a description of the 'tribal' practices of each group of philosophers, is especially instructive on this point.

essays, the most important of which may very well be what I will call the unarticulated theological 'registers' that give to the work done on each side of the fault line a distinctive 'tonality' with respect to its possibilities for engaging various forms of Christian theological discourse. These tonalities, moreover, are themselves indicative of differences with respect to how participants in each group understand and engage the 'life-worlds' of religious believers and their communities – and, increasingly important in 'a secular age', how they might engage the 'life worlds' of non-believers and the religiously indifferent.[5] As I will note in more detail latter, there is an important formal similarity here to how I will analyze the import of *Fides et ratio* in that attention needs to be paid to what that document does not fully articulate, particularly with respect to engaging analytic philosophy of religion; in this case, the important unarticulated presuppositions of the document bear upon the substance and grammar of its own philosophical and theological anthropology, as well as what it takes to be the operative counterparts of such anthropology in its enlarged range of philosophical interlocutors.

The third marker is intended to provide a sense of the 'place from which' *Fides et ratio* has moved prior Catholic philosophical and theological discourse to the opening it has now provided for engaging a wider range of philosophical conversation partners. The marker I offer here is biographical inasmuch as the philosophical and theological education I received through the mid-1960s through the mid-1970s, as well as my subsequent experience as a philosopher who has been part of a theology faculty for close to four decades, represents in concrete terms key points of the arc that plots the intellectual trajectory taken in *Fides et ratio* from polemic to dialogue. This journey starts from a Thomistic-scholastic mode of discourse that was energetically renewed in the nineteenth century and that could be simultaneously triumphalist and defensive it its idiom and moves to a late twentieth century readiness to engage constructively with at least some of the other philosophical idioms it had once looked upon with deep suspicion.

My starting point for locating this point of reference is a remark that a fellow Jesuit, a scientist some twenty years my senior, made to me during the spring of 1971 before I started doctoral studies in philosophy

[5] The distinction I am making here is between those who have, in one way or another, opted not to believe and those for whom religious belief does not enter into their 'social imaginary'.

at the University of Texas. From a previous conversation he was aware that one reason for my decision to seek an advanced degree in philosophy was a belief that, in the long run, it might be more useful than a degree in theology for helping to address the issues in theological ethics that then seemed to be most central.[6] He now wanted to know why I thought that the program in philosophy at Texas was suitable for what I was hoping to do in the future; I said to him that it had a reputation for being one of the few philosophy departments in the United States that seemed to be intentionally seeking to foster productive exchange between analytic and continental ways of doing philosophy, and that being part of that kind of exchange might be instructive for my future purposes. Part of his response to me was something to the effect that I should be careful not to become too engaged with that 'analytic stuff' – a remark uttered with a tone of concern that carried an implication that not too far down the analytic road lay the slippery slope going from scepticism to unbelief. His response was not totally a surprise to me, since it resonated with the adversarial tonality with which the forms of Thomist-scholastic philosophy taught in Catholic seminaries and universities since at least the late nineteenth century had treated all the philosophy it took to issue from Descartes' fatal mistake of turning toward the *cogito*. In consequence, they all were thought eventually to lead to one or another of the 'isms' – subjectivism, materialism, relativism, idealism, pantheism, and ultimately atheism – that oppose the integral truth about humanity,

[6] There was vigorous discussion at the time over the question of the distinctiveness of Christian ethics, particularly with respect to philosophical ethics, a debate well summarized in James Gustafson's 1975 book, *Can Ethics Be Christian?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975). There are resonances between that discussion and the revival of discussion about the possibility and the nature of 'Christian philosophy', for which one marker is the founding of the Society of Christian Philosophers in 1978. It is of note that this organization does not endorse any particular understanding of 'Christian philosophy', in that its membership 'is open to anyone interested in philosophy who considers himself or herself a Christian. Membership is not restricted to any particular "school" of philosophy or to any branch of Christianity, nor to professional philosophers.' (<http://www.societyofchristianphilosophers.com>, accessed July 24, 2013). An alternative set of perspectives on Christian philosophy, that places it in the context of earlier discussions of the issue among (mostly) European Catholic philosophers and theologians, can be found in *The Question of Christian Philosophy Today*, ed. Francis J. Ambrosio (New York: Fordham University Press, 1999). Key issues in all these discussions, in my judgment, are embedded in the larger phenomena of secularity that are described and analyzed in Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).

the cosmos, and God that reason, guided by the light of faith, is capable of discerning.

Though the concerns of my elder Jesuit colleague might have been later alleviated by the fact that in the course of doctoral studies my work did not take an 'analytic turn' – or at least not a full one – that work did go in a direction that, by the standards of the adversarial Thomisms of the mid-twentieth century was undoubtedly worse: it turned in the direction of Immanuel Kant. It would not directly serve the purpose of this essay to rehearse in detail the intriguing history of the more than two centuries of Catholic engagement with Kant and his intellectual heritage.[7] What is likely to be important, however, for our purposes, is an awareness that what I have argued for elsewhere as possibilities for a far less adversarial Catholic engagement with Kant[8] have emerged as at least a partial consequence of a greatly enriched understanding of the historical and cultural contexts out of which such a confrontational dynamic towards Kant developed as part of a larger Catholic response of resistance in various forms and at various levels, to 'modernity' and 'enlightenment'.[9] Attention to such historical and cultural contexts can be helpful for moving the mode of conversation from polemic to dialogue.

Let me now offer a more detailed look at these markers. I will concentrate on the first two, since the biographical one is, to a large degree, embedded within the dynamics at work in each of them. As already noted, the focus will be upon matters that, even though they are of importance in providing conditions for productive conversation

[7] For a wide-ranging account of this engagement see the essays in *Kant und der Katholizismus: Stationen einer wechselhaften Geschichte*, ed. Norbert Fischer (Freiburg: Verlag Herder, 2005).

[8] See Philip J. Rossi, 'Reading Kant from a Catholic Horizon: Ethics and the Anthropology of Grace', *Theological Studies*, 71 (2010), 79-100; 'Finite Freedom, Fractured and Fragile: Kant's Anthropology as Resource for a Postmodern Theology of Grace', *Philosophie et théologie*: *Festschrift Emilio Brito, SJ*, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium, 206, ed. Éric Gaziaux (Leuven: Peeters Press, 2007), pp. 47-60; 'Reading Kant through Theological Spectacles', *Kant and the New Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Chris L. Firestone and Stephen R. Palmquist (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), pp. 107-123; 'Die Bedeutung der Philosophie Immanuel Kants für die gegenwärtige katholische Theologie in den Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika', in Fischer, *Kant und der Katholizismus*, pp. 441-460.

[9] A growing body of historical scholarship examining 'Catholic Enlightenment' is showing that Catholic engagement with various currents of enlightenment thought and culture was by no means uniformly one of resistance. See *A Companion to the Catholic Enlightenment in Europe*, ed. Ulrich L. Lehner and Michael Printy (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

across these different idioms, are given, at best, only cursory attention in the two texts that I have referenced.

With respect to *Fides et ratio*, the most obvious matter of importance given little attention is the very heritage and practice of the forms of 'analytic philosophy' that by the mid-twentieth century had became a powerful idiom for philosophical discussion in the English speaking world and were starting to gain world-wide intellectual influence.[10] At one level, the absence of extensive engagement is not surprising, given that the larger intellectual trajectory out of which this document emerged only occasionally engaged that idiom and, when it did so, was more often than not in a polemical mode.[11] *Fides et ratio* moves in general consonance with the trajectory set out in the nineteenth-century revival of Thomism that resulted in an official approbation, in Leo XIII's encyclical, *Aeterni patris* (1879), of the work of Aquinas as a touchstone for the mutual engagement of philosophy and theology and that then launched an energetic outpouring of historical, textual, systematic, and polemical studies of Thomas and Thomism that has continued for more than a century.[12] Armed with the internal assurance of being *philosophia perennis*, there was little urgency for much of neo-Thomism to engage philosophical idioms other than its own, even as it focused on fierce internal disputes about which of its own schools of interpretation could lay the strongest claim to represent the thought of Thomas Aquinas authentically.[13] With respect to analytic philosophy in particular, moreover, it was perceived as a philosophical idiom that, inasmuch as it worked along epistemic and metaphysical trajectories that

[10] One allusion can be found in § 84 in which there is mention of 'analysis of language'.

[11] Perhaps most notably in a BBC radio debate from 1948 on the existence of God that took place between Frederick C. Copleston, SJ and Bertrand Russell.

[12] Important elements of this are laid out by Gerald A. McCool, *Catholic Theology in the Nineteenth Century: The Quest for a Unitary Method* (New York: Seabury Press, 1977). A particularly notable irony is that the historical work that was given major impetus by this official approbation of Thomas eventually showed considerable difference between Thomas's own teaching and the views put forth in his name by many of the important nineteenth century proponents of the Thomistic revival.

[13] An important exception to this was the work of the Belgian Jesuit, Joseph Maréchal, whose five volume major work, *Le point de départ de la métaphysique: leçons sur le développement historique et théorique du problème de la connaissance,* Bruxelles: L'Édition universelle (Paris: Desclée, De Brouwer, 1944-1949), intentionally engaged the work of Kant in a constructive manner and resulted in the distinctive style of 'transcendental Thomism', which had a significant impact on mid-twentieth century Catholic theology, most notably in the work of Karl Rahner, SJ.

diverged considerably from Thomistic realism, offered little prospect for constructive engagement, let alone convergence. It was seen as the heir of an empirical tradition that understood the human person and its relation to the world in ways, such as Hume's radical scepticism about the continuity of personal identity or the anthropological presuppositions about human motivation taken to be characteristic of utilitarianism, that provided little space for an openness of the human spirit to the reality of a transcendent God.

As McCool's work on the history of neo-Thomism indicates, by the mid-twentieth century such a dynamic of insularity was no longer sustainable; *Fides et ratio* may thus be considered as representing a new dynamic that makes dialogue as well as polemic a legitimate form for Catholic philosophy and theology to engage other forms of philosophical inquiry and discourse. The encyclical envisions that the range of conceptual idioms and philosophical grammars with which Catholic philosophers and theologians may now engage in constructive conversation now stretches beyond the ambit of the varieties of Thomism that held almost exclusive primacy as interlocutors until the last third of the twentieth century. It opens new lines for discussion of the relationships between philosophy and theology that engage, in a positive spirit, a range of philosophical idioms and methods considerably wider than had usually been allowed by prior parameters for such conversation – parameters that too often showed more alacrity for identifying adversaries to be refuted than for providing conditions for mutually respectful and enlightening exchanges over both commonalities and genuinely deep differences. Yet, neither analytic philosophy nor any of its major expositors is explicitly included as one of these new interlocutors, let alone as a potentially significant one.[14]

Analytic philosophy's perceived difference from – and even opposition to – the epistemic and metaphysical trajectories in consonance with the expanded Thomistic horizon that the encyclical affirms seems to be the central factor in its lack of engagement with the extensive work in philosophy of religion (or, alternately, philosophical theology) that has been done in the analytic mode since the last quarter of the twentieth

[14] With the exception of John Henry Newman (§ 74), no Anglophone philosopher or theologian is mentioned by name in the encyclical. A further indication that little attention is given to the traditions of English language philosophy is that pragmatism is dismissed as 'an attitude of mind, which in making its choices, precludes theoretical considerations or judgments based on ethical principles' (§ 89).

century. Yet I think there is a significant additional factor that contributes to this lack of engagement, namely, what was mentioned above as the unarticulated theological 'registers' in which that work has often been done. I think it is at least arguable that, with the notable exception of the attention paid to Aquinas and other prominent medieval thinkers, particularly with respect to the doctrine of God, as well as to Christology, the 'theological register' in which much of this work is set has been keyed to concerns that have more typically preoccupied various streams of Christian theology issuing from the reformation – most notably those in a Calvinist/Reformed mode – rather than Catholic theology. I also think that a case might be made for a connection between these two factors, inasmuch as one long standing line of Catholic apologetic with respect to the Reformation and its theological inheritance has been to trace the source of its theological errors back to the epistemological and metaphysical principles and presuppositions of late medieval nominalism, of which the traditions of British empiricism are taken to be the heir.[15]

A case in point is that, while a number of Catholics (a notable example would be the late Philip Quinn) have been prominent participants from the outset in the revival of analytic philosophy of religion and philosophical theology, the impact of that revival upon Catholic theology seems to have been marginal. There are, it must be noted, regional differences here: e.g. Catholic philosophers and theologians working in the academic context of the UK have been proportionately more likely to be familiar with and work within the idioms of analytic philosophy (e.g., Elizabeth Anscombe, John Haldane, Gerard Hughes, Fergus Ker, Janice Martin Soskice, Denys Turner) than their counterparts in the US. One index of this is that a perusal of the programs from the most recent meetings of the Catholic Theological Society of America gives little indication that, save in a few highly specialized areas, the guild of Catholic theologians in the United States sees any urgency for theological engagement either with the general methods of analytic philosophy or the range of work produced by analytic philosophers of religion.[16] Similarly, in the meetings and publications of the American

[15] A version of this argument appears in Brad S. Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

[16] There is an instructive set of essays, *Hermes and Athena: Biblical Exegesis and Philosophical Theology*, ed. Eleanore Stump and Thomas P. Flint (Notre Dame: University

Catholic Philosophical Association, though there has recently been more engagement with the methods and representative key works of analytic philosophy and the list of recent presidents includes some notable analytic philosophers (Linda Zagzebski (1997) and Eleanore Stump (2000)), the predominant philosophical idiom represented in its work remains the ramified discourse of a Thomism expanded and enriched primarily by engagement with a variety of historical and contemporary idioms of continental philosophy and to a much lesser degree with the idioms of analytic philosophy.

Conversely, engagement with the key works of major Catholic twentieth century theologians such as DeLubac, Rahner, Von Balthasar, or Lonergan, has rarely been a prominent focus of attention for the work of analytic philosophers of religion. I don't think that the reason for this at best oblique intersection with Catholic theology on either side lies principally in the fact that analytic philosophical methods have not found their way into the conceptual/linguistic 'toolbox' of most Catholic theologians, nor that these Catholic theologians employ theological grammars resistant to analytic parsing. I think that what has been, so far, only occasional peripheral engagement has had at least as much to do with the fact that the prominent sets of issues that have been at stake in analytic discussions – for instance, in addition to questions about the existence and attributes of god, there are those that cluster around the dynamics of sin, grace, redemption as these intersect with the epistemic and volitional structure and dynamics of the human condition (a major concern of the work of Alvin Plantinga) – have been set in a register more resonant with the theological agendas and theological anthropologies of the Reformation than with some of the important pre- or post-Reformation Catholic alternatives. Another set of issues, clustering around topics such as the divine attributes, arguments for God's existence, aspects of Christology, and theodicy, do intersect more directly with discussions that have been prominent loci in Catholic philosophical and theological discourse. These issues are pertinent as elements of what is termed 'fundamental theology', which in recent eras of Catholic theology has served as a locus of transition from philosophy to theology in which

of Notre Dame Press, 1993), that illustrate some of the methodological and interpretative challenges that arose from an effort to engage biblical scholars (most of whom work from a Catholic theological context) with analytic philosophers of religion. Part of the challenge and the irony of these exchanges is that the majority of participants consider themselves Christian believers.

one concern has been the articulation of apologetic arguments.[17] It is important, however, to note that there are exceptions in which there has been more engagement with analytic idioms, among the most notable being the work of David Burrell, who has been an important Catholic interlocutor on issues such as divine agency and divine freedom.[18]

Paying attention to what I have termed the theological registers that are implicit in the work of analytic philosophers of religion – and conversely to the implicit (as well as the explicit) philosophical registers in the work of Catholic theologians – offers, I believe, an initial strategy for surveying useful paths along which to link the intellectual territory delimited by the marker that is (textually) represented by *Fides et ratio* and that delimited by the marker represented by the discussions in *God, Philosophy, and Academic Culture*. At the same time, however, it is quite important to be attentive to some other families of philosophical idioms – or, to return to a spatial image, to some other philosophical territories – that so far have tended to stand in inchoate, tentative and/or uneasy relationships with both the idioms of analytic philosophy and the idioms of Catholic philosophy and theology delimited in *Fides et ratio*. Two of the other idioms clearly significant in this regard can be found, first, in the discourses of so-called post modernity, particularly with respect to their attentiveness to the contingency and finitude of the human condition, and, second, in the discourses of both reflective and practical engagement with the religious and cultural plurality that is deeply embedded in the human condition.

I would thus like to conclude by offering some brief considerations about each of these and their importance for shaping future conversations between philosophy and theology. My proposal here is that one important dimension of their significance lies in the extent to which they are allowed to function as disruptive idioms – or, perhaps more modestly, as idioms of surprise and de-centring – that require both analytic philosophy of religion and Catholic philosophy and theology

[17] An additional factor for the absence of full engagement seems to lie in the fact that there has been a distinctive institutional Catholic academic culture of higher education in the United States that has provided a context both for the maintenance of distinctive styles of Catholic philosophy and for measured engagement with the styles characteristic of the 'secular academy'.

[18] See, for instance, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993); *Knowing the Unknowable God: Ibn-Sina, Maimonides, Aquinas* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992).

to reexamine the adequacy of our own settled ways of speaking – or not speaking – of the divine and how we stand in our humanity in relation to the divine.

As already noted, *Fides et ratio* gives, at best, scant attention to the idioms of analytic philosophy but it does pay greater notice, though little of it positive, to modulations of the philosophical idioms that have emerged as an explicit engagement with the aftermath of modernity.[19] It also takes note, in generally more positive fashion, of the importance of engaging the philosophical dimensions that are operative, both as implicit and as reflectively articulated, in human cultural and religious diversity.[20] Yet the direction of its discussion of all of these idioms suggests that whatever positive value they have to bring to an engagement with the authoritative tradition(s) of Catholic philosophy and theology is to be measured by its consonance with that which the tradition already has fully and adequately in its possession. In this regard, even though *Fides et ratio* does not speak in the highly adversarial tonality in which neo-Thomism was often expressed, the scope of the plurality it allows and, in my view, the scope of what it sees as possible for Catholic philosophy and theology to learn from a robust engagement with plurality – and its potential for surprise or even disruption – remains circumscribed and hedged with great caution. With particular reference to issues of theological realism, moreover, it is important to note that the encyclical's affirmation of theological realism uses 'metaphysics' as a key term within its own idiom to express that caution and that it links a still strongly Thomist understanding of metaphysics to the possibility of affirming the transcendent reality that Christians name God.[21] Put in somewhat different terms, the encyclical does not seek to articulate a defence of theological realism, since it takes such realism simply as a given for the theological enterprise.

Yet there is a way in which *Fides et ratio* acknowledges (ironically in my judgment) the disruptive value of the 'post-modern': This is in the extent that these idioms are, often by intent, in deconstructive dissonance to both the tonality and the substance of the intellectual traditions of the

[19] §§ 46-47, 55-56, 61, 81, 84, 90-91 contain allusions and references to some of the elements that characterize a number of the forms of 'post-modern' philosophy. See Philip J. Rossi, SJ, 'After *Fides et Ratio:* New Models for a New Millennium', *Philosophy & Theology*, 12 (2000), 419-431.

[20] §§ 70-72, 95.

[21] §§ 83-85.

modernity that formed the context for their emergence.[22] In this regard, the encyclical is ready to enlist this dissonance as an ally for its own criticism of modernity.[23] At the same time, it resists the force of such dissonance as it might apply to its own locutions and pays little heed to the high demands this idiom makes for listening with an ear trained to discern the interstices and the interruptions that arise within its own locutions from silence, the unsaid, and the absence of the said. In consequence, *Fides et ratio* all too readily hears in the idioms of postmodernity only the monotone bleakness of nihilism or the cacophonies of relativisms. To that extent they can be all too readily dismissed as the latest – and among the least attractive – variants of high modernity; and in their most ironic forms they could be argued to display an 'exclusive anti-humanism' that stands as the shadow side of what Charles Taylor has described as modernity's 'exclusive humanism'.

Along with *Fides et ratio*, analytic philosophy of religion has often had notable reservations about the idioms of post-modernity and (perhaps to lesser degree) the idioms of religious and cultural plurality – though from conceptual and cultural bases that only partially overlap those operative in the judgments the encyclical makes. In some of these reservations there is, for instance, an engagement with issues articulated in terms of 'metaphysics', but there are significant differences from the encyclical in the operative construal of that term and its appropriate function in both philosophical and theological discourse.[24] As the essays in *God, Philosophy, and Academic Culture* almost all note these idioms of post-modernity and plurality have been far more frequently heard among those whose stand on the 'continental' side of the fault line dividing the discourses of philosophy of religion in Anglophone academic culture. In the two decades that have passed since the AAR session that engaged the differences between the two styles of philosophy of religion there seems

[22] In this, the encyclical offers an instance of one of the alliances that Charles Taylor sees as characteristic of 'the three, perhaps ultimately, four-cornered battle' in modern culture, in this case an alliance in which 'neo-Nietzscheans and acknowledgers of transcendence are together in their absence of surprise at the continued disappointments of secular humanism ... ' ('A Catholic Modernity?', *Dilemmas and Connections* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), p. 180).

[23] § 91.

[24] Some of these particular differences have their sources, not surprisingly, in the extent to which one views the various modern criticisms of 'metaphysics' as successful or not.

to have been some reorientations on both sides that have made possible more passages back and forth from different places along some of the major and minor fault lines.[25] The essays identify a number of intellectual and cultural factors that, particularly in retrospect, seem to have started to have an impact in this regard.[26] At the risk of oversimplification, let me suggest that what links a number of these factors is that, in a variety of ways, they exhibit the pressure of an insistent plurality that resists the deep and equally persistent human drive to closure that Susan Neiman has perceptively articulated in her treatment of 'sufficient reason'.[27] Put in more historical terms, the plurality that has become an insistently present dynamic in our global, interdependent, multi-cultural and multi-religious world has entered into challenging and potentially deeply creative play with the human drive to make comprehensive sense of things that Kant gestured toward in identifying it as human reason's 'natural tendency (*Naturanlage*) to metaphysics'.[28]

My reference to Kant is offered to suggest that, in seeking to engage the discourses of post-modernity and of religious and cultural plurality, both the long predominant idioms of Catholic philosophy and theology and many of the idioms of analytic philosophy of religion are posed with a range of challenges to the nature and the status of the systemic presuppositions on which they each operate. To put this challenge in Kantian terms, the challenge is the extent to which those presuppositions are more appropriately characterized and function as 'constitutive' or as 'regulative'. Put in a post modern idiom, the challenge is the extent to which dissonance, interruption, and fragmentation are to be recognized as bearing at least equal significance in efforts to make sense of the cosmos and of ourselves as are the harmony, continuity, and unity that are markers of systemic thought. Put in the idiom of religious and cultural plurality, the challenge is the extent to which the living traditions of reflective discourse and practice from Asia, the global South, and indigenous

[25] Interest in Kierkegaard from both sides seems to be one marker of this; see C. Stephen Evans, 'On Taking God Seriously: Philosophy of Religion in the APA and the AAR', in *God, Philosophy, and Academic Culture*, p. 69.

[26] For on overview that attends to a number of these developments, see William Wood, 'On the New Analytic Theology: or the Road Less Travelled', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 77 (2009), 941-960.

[27] Susan Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), pp. 314-328.

[28] Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics* § 60, AA 4: 362-365.

cultures now require those of us whose intellectual traditions have made us accustomed to heed, first and foremost, imperatives of systemic (and often monologic) unity, now need to attend far more carefully to plurality and otherness on its own terms as emergent from these life worlds. I would also like to suggest that such attention to interreligious and cross cultural plurality and otherness might make possible more productive and respectful attention to the historical plurality within our own traditions of philosophical and theological discourse as they have emerged (and continue to emerge) from the life worlds of the Christian East as well as the Christian West.[29]

I have tried to indicate in these concluding considerations that there is much value for our philosophical and theological enterprises if we take seriously the interruptive challenge that the idioms of postmodernity and of religious and cultural plurality pose to *the systemic character* of our enterprises; i.e., that aspect of our disciplines in which we labour to construct coherent and comprehensive patterns of meaning into which to fit all the different elements of our inquiry – *and* the life worlds that give rise to the inquiry in the first place. This is a challenge to which I believe we will have to pay attention once we attach significant weight – as I think we should – to post-modern idioms that express the deep fractures that run all the way down the contexts from which we humans seek to exact meaning, and to idioms of interreligious and intercultural engagement that articulate difference and otherness as constitutive in our efforts to shape meaning.

These idioms remind us how deeply fracture, difference, and otherness run down through ourselves as finite seekers of such meaning. We need to consider, as philosophers and theologians, the extent to which these fractures have methodological consequences upon the way we conceive of and conduct our inquiries precisely as systemic enterprises. If we do so, we may then be in a position to articulate, in a way appropriate to what Charles Taylor has described as the 'fractured horizons' of modernity and its aftermath, a 'methodological modesty' (and perhaps also a 'metaphysical modesty') about *what the systemic character of our enterprises may yield as finally ordered comprehensiveness* on behalf of human efforts to render the world – and ourselves as part of that world – intelligible. Such 'methodological modesty', moreover,

[29] This suggests that Christian ecumenism and interreligious engagement share a fundamental challenge with respect to religious otherness.

may provide an important context from which we could then properly grapple with the questions about whether and how we, and the world of which we are a part, can stand as it is and move forward toward what it ought to be only by our standing in relation to a transcendent Other that (freely) constitutes us in the finite otherness and the differences of the radical contingency of dependence to which Christian discourse has given the name 'Creation'.

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RICHARDS SWINBURNE'S CONCEPT OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE: AN ANALYSIS AND CRITIQUE

GREGOR NICKEL & DIETER SCHÖNECKER

University of Siegen

Abstract. The so-called 'argument from religious experience' plays a prominent role in today's analytical philosophy of religion. It is also of considerable importance to Richard Swinburne's apologetic project. However, rather than joining the polyphonic debate around this argument, the present paper examines the fundamental concept of religious experience. The upshot is that Swinburne neither develops a convincing concept of experience nor explains what makes a religious experience *religious*. The first section examines some problems resulting mainly from terminology, specifically Swinburne's use of appear-words as success-verbs. While these problems might be resolved by a recurrence to the observer, the second and third part of our paper present problems not so easily resolved: namely, that Swinburne's concept of experience as conscious mental events is too broad and inaccurate for its role in the argument given (Section 2); and that Swinburne does not even attempt to figure out which features of an experience, when present, turn an experience *simpliciter* into a distinctly religious experience (Section 3). Section 4, in conclusion, outlines possible reasons for this unusual and remarkable inaccuracy in conceptualisation.

'The term "experience" (taken as either a noun or a verb)
is notoriously slippery.'
Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*

The so-called *argument from religious experience* plays a prominent role in today's analytically coined philosophy of religion.[1] Therefore, it

[1] Many thanks to Winfried Löffler, Oliver Wiertz and Thomas M. Schmidt for valuable hints and discussions. – A German version of this paper was published in: Heinrich, E. / Schönecker, D. (Hrsg.), *Wirklichkeit und Wahrnehmung des Heiligen, Schönen, Guten – Neue Beiträge zur Realismusdebatte* (Paderborn: Mentis, 2011), pp. 125-146.

is not surprising that this argument is also of considerable importance to Richard Swinburne's almost canonical work *The Existence of God*;[2] as a matter of fact, he says so explicitly, writing that the argument is 'of most importance for the purpose of this book [i.e. to *The Existence of God*]' (p. 296).[3] It is of central importance because once it is shown that the probability of theism given evidence other than religious experience is not very low,[4] the 'testimony of many witnesses to experiences apparently of God suffices to make many of those experiences probably veridical'; thus the evidence of religious experience is a 'crucial piece of evidence' (p. 341).

Even so, there seem to be great discrepancies between the two (or three) editions of *The Existence of God*. While in the first edition (1979) Swinburne requires only that the probability of the existence of God given the classical arguments of natural theology should not be very low in order for the whole argument of religious experience to succeed, in the second edition (2004) he seems to believe not only that the probability *should not* be very low, but that it *should* be relatively high (something around 0.5).[5] This is not the place to trace the development of Swinburne's work, however. For this essay, it is sufficient to assess the work only to the extent that we can point out that the argument from religious experience is of central importance to Swinburne's overall argumentation.

Thus, the general purpose of our paper is *not* an analysis of this argument; neither its concrete implementation nor its specific role in the cumulative overall argument is of interest to us. Rather, our aim is to provide an analysis of the very *concept* that is indispensable to and that is indeed the kernel of the argument from religious experience, to wit,

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[2] The 'argument from religious experience' also plays a role, albeit only a minor one, in the likewise eminent work of Alvin Plantinga, especially in his *Warranted Christian Belief*. Its demoted importance in Plantinga's work is expected, however, since it is the quintessence of Reformed Epistemology and the core of Plantinga's concept of 'warrant' that belief in God does not need any arguments and also does not need any argument based on experience in particular). Furthermore, Plantinga's *properly basic beliefs* about God are formed independently from religious experience.

[3] Page numbers in brackets refer to Richard Swinburne's *The Existence of God*, Second Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

[4] Swinburne discusses the arguments in this order: The Cosmological Argument, Teleological Arguments, Arguments from Consciousness and Morality, The Argument for Providence, The Problem of Evil, Arguments from History and Miracles – and then The Argument from Religious Experience.

[5] We are confining our analysis to the edition of 2004. See also Löffler 2011.

the concept of *religious experience*. The reason is simple: Whatever the merits of the argument from religious experience are or could be, one would think that it can only work if it is based on a clear cut concept of religious experience; after all, that is what the argument is about. It is therefore of major concern for Swinburne's argumentation that he provide a convincing concept of 'religious experience'. Furthermore, it is remarkable that despite its significance for Swinburne's argumentation, until now there has been no detailed analysis of Swinburne's concept of religious experience; discussion has revolved entirely around evaluations of the argument itself. Thus, an analysis of Swinburne's concept of religious experience is, as far as we can tell, a desideratum.[6]

After some preliminary remarks, Swinburne begins his chapter on the argument from religious experience with a section on 'The nature of religious experience' (pp. 293-298); the next section is about 'Five kinds of religious experience' (pp. 298-303). After a little more than two and a half pages, Swinburne writes: 'So much for what an "experience" is and the ways in which we can describe it; but what constitutes a "religious experience"?' (p. 295). Thus there are two basic questions: What is an experience, and what is a religious experience?

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that Swinburne provides an unsatisfactory answer to both of these questions. Roughly speaking, we see three problems with Swinburne's concept of religious experience: (1) The first has to do with a distinction between what Swinburne calls 'internal' and 'external' descriptions of one's experiences and, based on this, a distinction between the 'epistemic' and 'comparative' use of so-called 'appear words'; this first, mainly terminological problem, although it takes some time to describe, can rather easily be resolved. The second and third problems are much more important and severe: Swinburne does not really explain what makes an experience an experience (2); because of this, but not only because this, he fails, thirdly (3), to explain what makes a religious experience *religious*. We will structure our analysis in this order.

[6] Franks Davis only mentions Swinburne's *concept* of religious experience marginally (1989: 22 f.), though Swinburne plays a major role to her work. She also nearly completely misses the particularities and problems we discuss here. Kwan, in his work *The Argument from Religious Experience* (2009), gives an overview of the current debate on the argument of religious experience. He, too, concentrates in his reproduction of Swinburne's variant of the argument on the argument itself and says little on Swinburne's concept of religious experience.

I. THE FIRST PROBLEM: 'INTERNAL' AND 'EXTERNAL' DESCRIPTIONS OF ONE'S EXPERIENCES

On the face of it, Swinburne's analysis has the following structure: He starts with a very broad definition of 'experience' as 'a conscious mental event' (p. 293). He then distinguishes between an external and an internal description of an experience: the former, if true, entails that the object that is experienced really exists, whereas the latter, internal description, if true, does not entail this. Swinburne's claim then is that 'all arguments from religious experience must be phrased as arguments from experience given internal descriptions' (p. 294). The vocabulary of such an internal description, Swinburne argues next, consists in terms such as 'appear' or 'seem' as well as in perception verbs such as 'look', 'feel', or 'taste'. All these terms, says Swinburne (following Chisholm), can have an 'epistemic' as well as a 'comparative' use; consequently, one expects an internal description of a religious experience to include an epistemic or comparative use of the language. In what follows, we will discuss Swinburne's model in more detail.[7]

According to Swinburne, religious experience is defined 'as an experience that seems (epistemically) to the subject to be an experience of God' (p. 295).[8] Obviously, this definition makes use of a rather obscure terminology, thus needing further explanation – for what does it mean that a religious experience is an experience that 'seems (epistemically) to the subject to be an experience of God'? To clarify this definition, we first have to turn to Swinburne's distinction between internal and external descriptions. Later we will see that this is where a problem for the definition arises.

In the following passage, Swinburne introduces his understanding of the distinction between internal and external descriptions:

> An experience may be described in such a way as to entail the existence of some particular external thing apart from the subject, beyond the stream of his consciousness, normally the thing of which it is an experience; or

[7] It is remarkable that Swinburne only spends two pages of his analysis on the nature of experience and perception. Already at this stage, we may note critically that a cumulative argumentation, whose success depends substantially on the argument from religious experience, probably would have made it worth spending more than two pages on analysing the nature of experience and perception.

[8] This quote has been shortened to fit our preliminary purposes; we will return to the complete definition later.

> it may be described in such a way as to carry no such entailment. Thus 'hearing the coach outside the window' is not unnaturally described as an experience; but if I have such an experience, if I really do hear the couch outside the window, then it follows that there is a coach outside the window. Yet, if I describe my experience as 'having an auditory sensation that seemed to come from a coach outside the window', my description does not entail the existence of anything external of which the experience was purportedly an experience (or anything else external). The former kind of description I will call an external description; the latter an internal description. (pp. 293 f.)

It is obvious that, with his talk of 'external description', Swinburne refers to the basic idea of realism in the philosophy of perception; namely, that one can only perceive (or experience) what is really there; thus (to reproduce an example by Swinburne), one cannot and does not hear a coach outside the window if there is no coach outside the window. In other words, Swinburne obviously believes that within an external description 'perceiving' is a success verb, i.e. a verb describing an act of perception (such as smelling, seeing, etc.), which implies that what one perceives is really there in order to be perceivable. This idea (which goes back to Gilbert Ryle) – that perception verbs are success verbs – is essentially a semantic idea. It states that appear words are used in such a way that they imply the existence of the object that is claimed to be perceived. Whoever claims to have heard a coach outside the window also claims that there is a coach outside the window. Should it turn out that there is no coach outside the window, then this person will no longer claim – or is no longer allowed to claim – that she has heard a coach outside the window; in fact, she has not heard a coach (maybe she hasn't heard anything or heard something else). Exactly in this sense, Swinburne writes that 'if I really do hear the coach outside the window, then it *follows* that there is a coach outside the window' (p. 294, emphasis added), whereas an internal description 'does *not entail* the existence of anything external' (p. 294, emphasis added). We will see later that, indeed, this kind of perceptual realism is one of Swinburne's crucial assumptions,[9] and that it is, among other things, the very assumption that leads to a misleading presentation.

[9] Considering the burden of proof, which religious perception has to take for the real existence of its object according to Swinburne's theory, it is of no surprise that he makes use of such a realistic concept.

Swinburne distinguishes explicitly between an experience and the way that experience is *described*; after all, it is not an external or internal experience, but an external or internal *description* of that experience that shall play the role of a premiss in an argument from religious experience. According to Swinburne,

(1) I hear a coach outside the window.

is an *external* description, whereas

(2) I have an auditory sensation that seems to come from a coach outside the window.

is an *internal* description. Again, on the assumption that 'hearing' is a success-verb, (1) can only be true if there is a coach outside the window that is making the sounds that I hear. On the other hand, (2) can be true even if there is no coach outside the window; I might very well have an auditory sensation that seems to come from a coach outside the window though there is no coach outside the window. Thus, (2) is true simply if I do have an auditory sensation that seems to come from a coach outside the window; for (2) to be true, I just need to report my experience correctly (and thus must not lie, for instance). Hence the truth conditions for (1) are more stringent than those for (2). For example, if a woman says she has an auditory sensation that seems to her to come from a coach outside the window, all I need to assume in order to believe that claim is that this person is truthful. Assuming perceptual realism, one can question whether she *really* heard a coach outside the window without having to question whether she *believes* that she hears such a coach; one does not have to doubt her truthfulness in order to doubt the existence of the coach.[10]

Swinburne does not make such painstaking terminological clarifications as we do here, but these clarifications are well suited to his more general remarks on perception. The following quote, consisting of such general remarks, amounts to Swinburne's endorsement of perceptual realism:

> It seems to me, for reasons that others have given at length, that the causal theory of perception is correct – that S perceives x [...] if and only

[10] But if one denies perceptual realism (and the theory of success verbs), one can doubt the existence of the coach outside the window without also doubting that somebody is hearing such a coach (and not only has an auditory experience, which seems to come from a coach outside the window).

> if an experience of its seeming (epistemically) to S that x is present is caused by x's being present. So S has an experience of God if and only if its seeming to him that God is present is in fact caused by God being present. (p. 296)

The causal theory of perception that Swinburne adopts in this passage concerns more than the mere description of an experience; for this is a theory about *how* real objects bring about perceptions, to wit, causally. This causal aspect of the theory has severe problems of its own. We will not confront them here.

Pertaining to the description of experience and in order to elicit the difficulties in Swinburne's account that arise from such descriptions, we first have to look at a distinction that Swinburne himself, following Chisholm, calls 'crucial' (p. 294): the distinction 'between the epistemic and the comparative uses of such verbs as 'seems', 'appears', 'looks' etc.' (pp. 294 f.). As already pointed out in the beginning, it is important to understand that this distinction is a distinction *within* or *for* internal descriptions. People give internal descriptions of their experiences, and they do so by means of terms like 'appear' or 'seem' as well as by perception-verbs such as 'look', 'feel', or 'taste'. Of all these terms – Chisholm calls them 'appear words' – there can be an epistemic and a comparative use; but in any event, they are used in *internal* descriptions.

Now according to Swinburne's account, internal descriptions are internal because they describe only *the experience itself* without implying anything about the possible existence of the object that might have caused the experience; and there is no such implication, one would think, because a person that describes an experience internally expresses some *doubt* about the possible existence of that object. For example, if I have an experience and describe it with (2), then I might claim that I have an auditory sensation that *seems* to come from a coach outside the window, but it just seems that way; maybe there is a coach, maybe not. According to Swinburne, in sentences like (2), the term 'seem' is used epistemically: 'To use such words in their epistemic use is to describe what the subject is inclined to believe on the basis of his present sensory experience' (p. 295). When uttering (2), I do not claim that there is in fact a coach outside the window. I only claim to have an auditory experience that seems to come from a coach outside the window. However, when using the term 'seem' epistemically like in (2), I want to express my inclination to believe that this auditory experience *probably* has its cause

in a coach outside the window. I am un*certain* of its cause; for if I were certain, I would simply give an external description and utter (1). But since I am only '*inclined* to believe' (p. 295, emphasis added) that there is a coach outside the window, since I have only an 'inclination' (p. 295) to this belief, I will describe my experience with (2).

It remains unclear precisely *how much* I am inclined to this belief in a coach outside in order to utter (2), or how probable I must think it that there is a coach outside the window. Indeed, Swinburne says nothing about it. But I must find it more likely that there is a coach outside the window than not; but again, I must not be completely convinced of it, for otherwise my description would not be internal but external (or should be so), and I would use description (1). On the other hand, if I find it unlikely that there is a coach outside the window, or even if I'm quite positive that there is none, I'll describe my experience internally by making a comparative use of 'seem', saying maybe (2), but meaning something like this:

(3) I hear something that sounds like a coach would normally sound outside the window.

By (3), I am not saying that there is no coach outside the window. However, I must have serious doubts, believing that somehow it is rather unlikely that there really is a coach. If I did find it somewhat likely, or in other words if I were inclined to believe that there is a coach, then I would probably utter (2). On Swinburne's account, it is crucial to internal descriptions that they express a more or less strong doubt about the external object that might be perceived; this 'more or less' can further be differentiated and expressed by the epistemic and comparative use of those terms.

From this background-theory arises a serious problem for Swinburne's definition of 'religious experience'. According to Swinburne, an experience that seems to a subject epistemically to be an experience of God must be an experience described internally; for only experiences described internally involve epistemic uses of appear words. This fits well with Swinburne's early claim that 'all arguments from religious experience must be phrased as arguments from experiences given internal descriptions' (p. 294). An experience that seems (epistemically) to the subject to be an experience of God is an experience out of which, as already seen in the example of the coach above, arises an *inclination to believe* that God exists or is somehow present. Any description of

such an experience will be an internal description. Someone who makes a religious experience will describe it for instance like this:

(4) I have a visual sensation that seems to come from God.

Such a person does not (strongly) believe that her sensation does, as a matter of fact, come from God; if she did, she would have no reason to utter a sentence like (4) but rather would describe her experience externally. This has a strange consequence: if someone, for instance, sees God (say in a burning bush) and 'on the basis of his present sensory experience' (p. 295) forms the (strong) belief that she is in the presence of God, then, by Swinburne's definition, this is *not* a religious experience, which means further that it is not an experience that may serve as a premise in the 'argument from religious experience'. According to Swinburne, a religious experience is (as already quoted) defined 'as an experience that just seems (epistemically) to the subject to be an experience of God' (p. 295) such that the subject to some extent below certainty is just *inclined* to believe that God exists as the object of experience. So, according to Swinburne, people with true faith who believe to have a religious experience in fact cannot have a religious experience, since Swinburne includes the requirement of doubt into his definition of a religious experience. That seems odd to say the least and indeed too odd to be true and to be intended or even accepted by Swinburne.[11]

This consequence seems so absurd that we should look for another interpretation. In defence of Swinburne, one might come up with the following reply: Swinburne appeals to Chisholm's distinction between the epistemic and the comparative use of appear words. Now Swinburne writes, 'to use such words in their epistemic use is to describe what the subject is *inclined to believe* on the basis of his present sensory experience' (p. 295, emphasis added). Unfortunately, by emphasising the *inclination* to believe as part of an epistemic use of appear words,[12] Swinburne gives the impression that in an internal description using appear words epistemically, some subject S expresses some doubt about the object allegedly perceived; Swinburne gives the impression that S, who describes her experience, will not have a firm belief in any

[11] On a conference at the university of Frankfurt (October 2009), Swinburne conceded that some of his definitions in this area might be a little 'sloppy'.

[12] In the crucial passage (p. 295) Swinburne talks about such an 'inclination' five times.

event. But this impression, so the general defence, is misleading and unintended. Indeed, a quick look at Chisholm's original text and theory shows that using an appear word does not rule out a strong belief at all. Says Chisholm:

> If I say that the ship 'appears to be moving' [...] then it may be inferred that I believe, *or* that I am inclined to believe, that the ship is moving. When appear words are used in this way, then such locutions as 'x appears to S to be so-and-so' and 'x appears so-and-so to S' may be taken to imply that the subject believes, *or* is inclined to believe, that x is so-and-so.[13]

Thus, whereas Swinburne just writes that S has an *inclination* to believe something, e.g. that the ship is moving, Chisholm writes (twice) that S believes *or* is inclined to believe such a thing. So we should read Swinburne while having in mind Chisholm's thoughts. If someone makes an epistemic use of appear words in a sentence such as, for instance,

(5) God appears to be talking to me.

she is not necessarily expressing any doubt about what she believes; she might very well and strongly believe that God is talking to her. According to Chisholm, she could just as well have said

(5*) Apparently – or evidently – God is talking to me.

So the defence of Swinburne concludes with the following observation: it is a misinterpretation of Swinburne to assume that internal descriptions of experiences (including internal descriptions of religious experiences) making epistemic use of appear words express doubt.

Unfortunately for Swinburne's position, this defence is futile. To Chisholm the epistemic use of an appear word is by no means an indication of some doubt on part of the subject. To use, for example, 'appear' epistemically is just another way to express one's perceptual belief. If S claims that it appears to her that the ship is moving (to pick up Chisholm's example) she could just as well claim that she sees that the ship is moving (and hence that she believes that the ship is moving). In his chapter on the uses of appear words, Chisholm begins with a definition of 'perceive' in the propositional sense. In this definition he points out that a person who makes an epistemic use of an appear word can easily fulfil the conditions of actually perceiving the object that the

[13] Cp. Chisholm 1957: ch. 4, 43-53 (p. 43, emphasis added).

person refers to – all that is required is that the person merely uses the appear word to describe her perception.

Assume that Swinburne's account of internal descriptions is along the lines of Chisholm's own account. Then Swinburne faces another difficulty. The reason why Swinburne introduces a distinction between external and internal descriptions in the first place is that he wants to avoid a blatant *petitio principii* in the argument from religious experience. Such an argument would run as follows:

1. Joe sees Poseidon standing by the window.
2. Whenever a person sees x, x really exists.

Therefore, Poseidon really exists (and is standing by the window).

The problem with this, says Swinburne, is 'that there is going to be considerable doubt about the truth of the [first] premiss' (p. 294). The first premise can only be true if Poseidon really exists; for Poseidon's existence is the requirement that makes it possible for Joe to really *see* Poseidon standing by the window. What is to be proved (Poseidon's existence), is already presupposed in the first premise (whereas the truth of the second premise does not depend on the success-character of the term 'seeing', but on the 'principle of credulity'). To avoid this problem, Swinburne suggests to use only internal descriptions because these descriptions, again, do '*not* entail the existence of anything external' (p. 294, emphasis added); rather, they report only an experience and they report it epistemically.

So on Swinburne's own account Joe does not, properly speaking, believe at all that Poseidon is standing by the window (and, therefore, exists); he just has an *inclination* to believe so. If, on the other hand, one assumes (generously and against what Swinburne says) that Swinburne's account of internal and external is not different from Chisholm's original account, then Swinburne is unable to avoid a circularity he pointed out himself, a circularity that led him to avoid external descriptions of experience for an argument from religious experience in the first place.

To sum up shortly, Swinburne is confronted with the following dilemma: either the perception verbs that are used to describe religious experiences are used *externally*, which means using them as achievement verbs – but then it follows that the argument from religious experience is circular. *Or*, as Swinburne suggests, perception verbs used to describe religious experiences are used as *epistemically internal* descriptions – but

then the person who uses them cannot believe as strong as one would suppose someone to believe who has a religious experience.

These problems are not least generated, we believe, by the fact that Swinburne does not discriminate between the first and third-person-perspective. We already hinted to Swinburne's emphasis of the fact that in an argument from religious experience descriptions are involved, i.e. internal descriptions (as opposed to external descriptions). But *whose* descriptions are these? Given the way Swinburne introduces internal and external descriptions, it is strongly suggested that the subject that makes the experience describes this experience herself. In any event, in the examples that Swinburne provides it is the subject *herself* that speaks: 'If *I* really do hear the coach outside the window', or: 'Yet, if *I* describe my experience as ... ', or: '*I* talked to God last night', or: '*I* saw Poseidon standing by the window' (all p. 294, there are more examples). Now if we as philosophers of religion take such a first-person-description as the premiss of an argument from religious experience, we are faced with the problem that we either beg the question by having to take perception verbs as achievement verbs in the context of an external description, or we run into the problem of only being able to acknowledge those experiences with dubitable objects as 'religious experiences'. But why make things so complicated? Of course, unless we make religious experiences of our own, we will have to start with what someone reports and describes. What Joe reports is that he saw Poseidon standing by the window. But then all we have to do is to change to the third-person-perspective. Thus, taking into consideration Swinburne's goal of *prima facie* justification,[14] the above argument from religious experience would get the following form:

1. Joe has an experience that he describes as seeing Poseidon standing by the window.
2. Whenever a person has an experience that he or she describes as seeing some external x, then he or she is prima facie justified in believing that x really exists.

Therefore, Joe is *prima facie* justified in believing that Poseidon really exists.

[14] It is a different matter that this kind of *prima facie* justification does not help much within the apologetic debate. At least, a clearer formulation of the argument shows more precisely where the difficulties lie – e.g. in the missing persuasiveness of experiences had by only a few to those not having had the same experiences.

This concludes the discussion of the first problem.[15] Now let us turn to more serious problems such as the second. The question is: 'What makes an experience an experience?'

[15] The most simple solution to Swinburne's problems would probably be to give up the theory of success verbs; but this is not what we want to discuss here. We think that there are cases in which there are good reasons to say that someone *hears* something that does not exist. Such cases, if they exist, prove that 'hearing' is not a success verb and, *a forteriori*, that 'perceiving' is no success verb. Think about what it really means to state that a verb like 'hearing' (to take it as an example) is a success verb. It means: The speakers of a certain (english-speaking) language community which make use of the verb 'hearing', use it *de facto* as a success verb; it should not be used differently; this is an implicit rule within the community and the speakers accept that rule or would accept it, after having become clear about it. The theory that hearing is a success verb is, in fact, not (part of) an attempt to give a definition of that verb which neglects common speech. However, it is also possible to show that even philosophers who take perception verbs to be success verbs do not always comply to using them according to their theory. Richard Schantz, for example, writes in an essay on the plasticity of perception (2000: 66), where he is discussing the phenomenon of phoneme restoration: 'In these cases, a person hears a recording of a word, from which a phoneme was removed and replaced by a click-sound. Though she knows about the manipulation, she *hears* the whole word.' It is remarkable that Schantz writes that the subject hears a recording of the word which is missing a phoneme and that the subject, even if she knows about the phonemic gap, '*hears*' the whole word. How could that be possible if 'hearing' was a success verb? If 'hearing' would be a success verb, one could only hear what is in fact present in form of an acoustic signal. Suppose, the word uttered is 'EiseCLICKbahn'. The subject could not *hear* 'Eisenbahn', since the word 'Eisenbahn' would not have been uttered and one cannot hear what has not been uttered. Since we (and also Schantz), in fact say (and want to continue saying) that the subject hears 'Eisenbahn', 'hearing' cannot be an success verb. In conversation, Schantz objected to our argument as follows: If somebody sees a table whose surface is mostly covered by a tablecloth, we still say that the person sees the (whole) table, though she does not see it completely. However, this analogy is flawed, since in the example of the table, the table is present as a whole and is only partly perceived. In contrast, the acoustic sequence of the word 'Eisenbahn' is *not* present; therefore, it is not as if the word was completely there but only partially (since covered by a CLICK) perceived. The word is not there (is not uttered, does not exist) and, therefore, could not be heard if 'hearing' was a success verb. But we say that the subject hears it. Therefore, 'hearing' is no success verb. But why is it then, that Schantz says that the subject 'hears' the whole word, even if the word has not been uttered? And why is it, that we are used to speak that way and do not want to change our way of speaking? The reason may be that the verb 'hearing' refers to what is subjectively given to the perceiving subject, something that does not change, regardless whether what causes it exists or not. But then should we not also say that even hallucinating people *hear* something that is not there? The reason why we do not want to say that a hallucinating person 'hears' something could be that we assume the cognitive apparatus of hallucinating people to be deficient, which is not the case for the subject in Schantz's example.

II. THE SECOND PROBLEM: WHAT MAKES AN EXPERIENCE AN EXPERIENCE?

As already noted, Swinburne begins with a very broad definition of 'experience': 'An experience is a conscious mental event' (p. 293). Later upon moving to the concept of *religious* experience, Swinburne appears to identify the act of experiencing God with being *aware* of God. Says Swinburne: 'What is it for the subject to be right, in fact to *experience* God, *that is*, to be *aware* of God, and in a very general sense to perceive God ... ' (p. 296, emphasis added); then again, Swinburne identifies perception with awareness: '"Perceive" is the general verb for awareness of something apart from oneself' (p. 296).

To begin with a minor note, the latter definition is certainly misleading: That 'experience' is the experience 'of some particular external thing *apart from the subject*' (p. 292, emphasis added) and, accordingly, that 'perceive' is the 'general verb for awareness of something *apart from oneself*' cannot be taken literally; for there is, of course, *inner* perception too, e.g. when it comes to pain, where we perceive something that is not 'apart from the subject'. Of course, Swinburne is aware of this problem, so that one should ask why he presents this rather strict definition of perception. The answer could be that Swinburne wants religious experience (or religious perception, if veridical) not to be a kind of perception of inner objects or states, but a kind of perception of God.[16] However, it would surely have made more sense to distinguish between inner and outer perception; this would have allowed Swinburne to point out more clearly what makes a perception, inner or outer, a perception at all.

To claim that experience is a conscious mental event is certainly true; but recognising this is unenlightening because this very same predicate – to be a conscious mental event – applies, of course, to quite different things such as thinking, perceiving, feeling, memorising, introspection, and maybe some more. All these are mental events, but not experiences. Our concern is simple but crucial: Swinburne provides no account *whatsoever* of what makes a conscious mental event an experience. Although he offers a necessary condition for something to be an experience (a conscious mental event), this condition is obviously not sufficient. To have *thoughts* about God is a conscious mental event too; if we are to distinguish

[16] Cp. footnote 2 on p. 295, where Swinburne explicitly speaks of religious or quasi-religious experiences (e.g., in Buddhist tradition), which are not experiences 'of anything external' and which he wants to exclude.

thoughts about God from *experiencing* God, we need to know more than just that the latter is a conscious mental event. The experience of God must be understood as a source of knowledge about God that is different from possible other sources such as *a priori* knowledge, logical arguments, or thinking in general. This is not only a narrow-minded remark on a minor definitional mistake that could easily be corrected. The weight of the 'argument from religious experience' essentially comes from the fact that the basis of this argument (i.e., religious experience) differs significantly from the basis of other arguments that Swinburne treats in previous chapters of his work.

On the one hand, one might think that what Swinburne has in mind when it comes to a religious experience is something like a religious perception, i.e. a perception that involves sensations or common sensory experiences. Thus his first major example of an experience is clearly about perception, the subject's '*hearing* the coach outside the window' (p. 294, emphasis added). On the other hand, an early example of a religious experience – 'I became conscious of a timeless reality beyond myself' (p. 294) – is an experience not clearly, or in any event, not necessarily based on common perception. Later on, Swinburne notes that this example belongs to one of five kinds of religious experience; and that this kind of religious experience is characterised by the fact that the experience is one 'the subject does *not* have by having sensations' (p. 300, emphasis added), which means that she has it without having sense impressions.[17] With this kind of religious experience, it is ruled out that religious experiences are experiences as conscious mental events necessarily involving sensations; for here is an experience that a subject can have without any sensations (Swinburne refers primarily to 'mystical' experiences, p. 300). Swinburne claims that such an awareness is a kind of *experience*, but we learn nothing of what *makes* it an experience; we should not think of common experiences or perceptions here – but of what else? What distinguishes a religious experience of the fifth kind from the thoughts of Anselm, inventing and writing down the ontological argument, or from the experience of someone considering and reading it?

[17] In this context (pp. 298 ff.), Swinburne also speaks of 'visual sensations' (p. 299) and 'auditory sensations' (p. 299), so he is obviously thinking of impressions mediated by our senses, which means (most prominently) impressions of our eyes or ears, or, shortly: sense-impressions.

Finally, the possibility of having an experience without sensations leads to a further problem concerning the concept of internal descriptions. Swinburne defines 'religious experience', as we already quoted, as 'an experience that seems (epistemically) to the subject to be an experience of God (either of him just being there, or of his saying or bringing about something) or of some other supernatural thing' (p. 295). On the other hand, the epistemic use of appear words is defined as follows: 'To use such words in their epistemic use is to describe what the subject is inclined to believe on *the basis of his present sensory experience*' (p. 295, emphasis added). From this it follows, that any religious experience, since it always *seems* (epistemically) to the subject to be an experience of God, is an experience that brings about a belief, or in any event, an inclination to form or have a belief, 'on the basis of present sensory experience'.

At the same time, Swinburne identifies the experience of God with the perception of God. Here 'perception', however, is defined in a way that does not entail that someone who perceives something does so 'on the basis of present sensory experience'; '"Perceive"', says Swinburne, 'is the general verb for awareness of something apart from oneself, which may be mediated by any of the ordinary senses [...] *or by none of these*' (p. 296, emphasis added). But if religious experience, that is, religious perception, may occur without the mediation of the senses, then these occurrences cannot be instances to be described with an epistemic use of 'seeming'; for such an experience is an experience that makes the subject inclined to believe something 'on the basis of his present sensory experience', which obviously is not available if there is no mediation by the senses.

So either Swinburne gives up his broad understanding of 'perception' (that allows him to include non-sensory experiences), or he ought to alter his understanding of the epistemic use of appear words allowing an epistemic use that is not based on sensory experience. As already mentioned, the fifth type of religious experience is introduced as one 'that the subject does *not* have by having sensations' (p. 300). That is compatible with the wide use of 'perception' but it conflicts with the use of 'seeming' as part of what a religious experience is in the first place.

In summary, it is our opinion that Swinburne's definition of experience is grained too coarsely, neither allowing him to describe religious experiences as religious experiences nor allowing him to distinguish them from other mental events that are also about religious objects. In order to

avoid leaving common speech (as well as philosophical tradition) too far aside, whoever is dealing with experience and perception on a theoretical basis should take the feature of *givenness* into account. Especially when something is given to somebody not on the basis of sense experience (by one of our five or more senses), it seems reasonable to think of religious experience in terms of *religious emotions*. It is therefore worth noting that Swinburne has nothing to say on emotions – even when he speaks of a kind of religious experience that a 'subject does not have by having sensations'. The basic problem we discussed so far – that Swinburne cannot explain what an experience is – will become even more problematic when we now turn to the third problem. For Swinburne also fails to explain what a *religious* experience is.

III. THE THIRD PROBLEM: WHAT MAKES AN EXPERIENCE A RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE?

By definition, a religious experience is 'an experience that seems (epistemically) to the subject to be an experience of God or of some other supernatural being'. But what exactly does this mean?

Let us take a quick look at Swinburne's *classification* of religious experience: there are five kinds of religious experience, Swinburne says (pp. 298-303); two of them are public, three are private. In the first kind of religious experiences, *ordinary* public objects such as a night sky are understood as supernatural objects.[18] In the second kind, *unusual* public objects – such as a man looking and talking like Jesus in the comparative sense after crucifixion – are taken to be religious objects, taken, for instance, to *be* Jesus. Here, it is important to note that Swinburne states that nonbelievers (non-religious people) will have the *same* sense-impressions as believers – otherwise it would not be a public experience – but rather *no* religious experience at all: in his own words: 'A sceptic might have the *same visual sensations* (described comparatively) and yet not have the religious experience' (p. 299). In the third kind of religious experience (which is the first kind of *private* religious experience), the experience of God is based upon ordinary sensations, or at least sensation that can be described in common terminology (one hears or sees God). Contrarily, in the fourth kind of religious experience there are

[18] 'Thus someone may look at the night sky, and suddenly, "see it as" God's handiwork.' (p. 299)

experiences accompanied by ordinary-sensations but not describable in 'normal vocabulary' (p. 300). We have already mentioned the fifth kind of religious experience: it is a religious experience that is characterised by *not* having sense impressions while nevertheless having an experience of God.

Having introduced these five kinds of religious experience, Swinburne himself then raises the following question: 'What was it about your experience that made it seem to you that you were having an experience of God?' (p. 301). Clearly, the question drives at the object of the experience ('What was it about your experience that made it seem to you that you were having an experience of *God*?') and not at the way of referring to God (the question is not: 'What was it about your experience that made it seem to you that you were having an *experience* of God?'). In any event, it is neither clear nor even discussed what makes an experience an experience of *God*, and this is because for the first four kinds of religious experience, Swinburne gives what he calls a 'partial answer' (p. 301). The subject that has the experience has 'such-and-such auditory or visual or other describable sensations' (p. 301). However, with regard to the religious experiences of kind one, two and three, this answer is only partial, because according to Swinburne 'the mere fact that one was having such-and-such sensations does *not* make the experience seem to be of God; someone else could have those sensations *without* thereby having a religious experience' (p. 301, emphasis added). For instance, where a believer sees the night sky as God's handiwork, someone else just sees the night sky; where believers in the cathedral of Naples see the liquefaction of a sample of Saint Januarius' blood, non-believers just see some fluid.

Now if sensations of this sort as part of a religious experience are *not* what make an experience an experience of God, then what is it? By calling the answer partial, Swinburne suggests that sensations are necessary, but not sufficient. Since Swinburne says nothing about the other part of a possible full answer, the sufficient conditions for a religious experience, it remains mysterious what makes a religious experience an experience of God. It seems natural to argue that whatever makes such an experience an experience *of God* is based on the experiencing subject's *awareness* of the existence of God. As stated elsewhere, Swinburne identifies these two things ('What is it of the subject to be right, in fact to *experience* God, *that is,* to be *aware* of God, and in a very general sense to perceive God ... ', p. 296, emphasis added). But 'to be aware of God' is not a sufficiently

distinctive feature of religious experiences. Mere *thinking* about God already means that the thinker is aware of (the existence of) God.

A subject might be aware of God in another way than by thinking, perhaps somehow related to sense impressions or analogous to perception. In reply to this idea one has to take into account that such sensory content might be present in a strict sense (referring to sense impressions; cp. the kinds of religious experiences 1-4), but that such content would *not* be religious *in itself*, since other subjects could have exactly the same sense impressions ('might have had the same visual sensations') too. Yet if sense impressions are not the distinctive features of religious experiences, then it remains obscure what indeed are the distinctive features of one's experience that makes a religious experience religious. Emotional components of experience – think of Schleiermacher's famous 'feeling of absolute dependence' – could perhaps be entertained here as a possible distinctive feature; however, they just seem not to be important to Swinburne.

Let us briefly consider one example. If it is possible that a sceptic and Jesus' disciples 'had the same visual sensations (described comparatively)' (p. 299) regarding the risen Jesus, then what makes the experience of the disciples a religious experience cannot simply be those visual sensations. Swinburne himself speaks of 'the religious experience of *taking* the man to be the risen Jesus' (p. 299, emphasis added); but *taking* something to be so-and-so is different from *experiencing* something as so-and-so. To take something as so-and-so is to *interpret* something as so-and-so, but an interpretation of one's experience is not the experience itself. In defending the 'principle of credulity', Swinburne discusses Chisholm's proposal to restrict the application of the principle to what Chisholm calls 'sensible' characteristics and relations, by which he means the 'proper objects of sense' (such as blue, soft, cold, etc.) and the 'common sensibiles' (such as being the same, right, left, etc.).[19] So only an experience of sensible characteristics would be a real experience; anything else is an interpretation of such experiences whereby one infers that something is the case. For example, one experiences that something is blue; one interprets that something is a blue-dwarf-star. To use one of Swinburne's examples: Babylonian astronomers interpret their experiences of movements in the sky as holes in the firmament; Greek astronomers interpret them as the movements of physical bodies.

[19] Cp. Swinburne p. 307.

Swinburne replies that one can perceive complex objects (one's wife, a Victorian table, a blue-dwarf-star, etc.) without being able to back up the perceptual beliefs (e.g.: There walks my wife!) by beliefs about sensible characteristics.

Transferring this well-known problem to the current discussion, is there a sensory content of perception free from interpretation? As for the discussion about the perception of God, it is obvious what problems for the concept of such a perception arise. Early on in his book, Swinburne defines God as 'a person without a body (i.e. a spirit) who necessarily is eternal, perfectly free, omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good, and the creator of all things' (p. 7). Later on, he claims that God is 'defined in terms of properties of which most of us have had experience. He is defined as a 'person' without a 'body' who is unlimited in his 'power', 'knowledge', and 'freedom" (pp. 306 f.). But these properties – person, power, knowledge, and so on – are clearly not perceivable by strength of our senses. Rather, we *interpret* certain sensory impressions to be caused by a powerful, free, knowing, etc. person. In any event, Swinburne either needs to argue that 'Godness' is perceivable like one of the sensible characteristics – like blue or soft – or that it is analogous to complex properties like tea-smelling or blue-dwarf-stars. Either way seems to be a dead-end.

IV. SUMMARY AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

In summary, it should have become clear that the attempt to construct an 'argument from religious experience' already failed at the beginning due to an insufficient definition of the term 'religious experience'. The first difficulty, we noted, is mainly terminological; that those experiences accompanied by an inclination to believe and described externally are, by Swinburne's own *definition,* not religious experiences. This difficulty could be resolved by either explicitly referring to the experiencing subject's perspective or giving up the theory of success-verbs.

The other problems are more serious. They show that Swinburne has neither a clear and adequate concept of experience, nor can he point out the characteristic features of *religious* experiences. It is remarkable that a follower of analytical philosophy of religion, a philosophy which generally stresses the importance of precise terminology (as Swinburne

himself does), allows for such inaccuracy[20] in his terminology. Furthermore, there has even been a long substantive debate on the argument in which the problems we noted have never been discussed.

A reason might be that Swinburne (in contrast to Alston) seems not to be very interested in a precise phenomenology of religious experiences. In particular, there is no precise exegesis (for example) of biblical reports of experiences of God. The story of the burning bush, the narrative of Emmaus or the Easter narratives all describe rather sensitive experiences that surely are not grasped in their full complexity when – analogous to Swinburne's example – merely understood as a 'perception of objects'.

Another reason can probably be found in a conflict of goals: On the one hand, the persuasiveness of sense perception should be transferred to religious perception; but that means leaving out from the concept of religious experience everything that looks like a religious *interpretation* of usual or unusual events or like a religious *emotion* coming along with such experiences. On the other hand, the experiences mentioned here (which Swinburne never describes precisely) are rare, unusual or even non-sensory experiences that are precisely not analogous to ordinary sense-perceptions. Furthermore, they are expected to carry the burden of proof for a conclusion that has heavy implications for whoever accepts it. While the persuasiveness of reports of sense-experiences is, in principle, based on the possibility to verify the reported observation for oneself – sometimes after necessary preparations or training, as in the cases of Galileo and observations by telescope – this can hardly be done for religious experiences.

How far Swinburne extends the concept of experience becomes apparent in his reply to a critique which states that religious experience could be caused by something other than the religious object that the witnesses report to have experienced. To this common critique (mentioned already in the New Testament, Acts 2:13: 'They [the disciples] are filled with new wine' or as projection-theory in the classical critique of religion), Swinburne replies by pointing out that God is the cause of all thoughts and events and, therefore, that every experience, especially every religious experience, is caused by God.[21] If that is true, the claim 'I have an experience which is caused by God' cannot be false. But the

[20] On a side note, Swinburne's excessive use of mathematical probability theory is rather pretending precision than demonstrating it; cp. also Nickel 2011.

[21] Cp. Swinburne, p. 320.

question *if* it is true at all, should be answered by referring to religious experiences; it follows that such an argument would be immune to all critique.

Besides, there has never been *de facto* a sceptic who has been convinced by reports of religious experiences (consider, for example, doubting Thomas). Much less convincing would even be an argument based on those reports, as Swinburne has to offer. If we are to avoid suggesting that the collapse of the whole argumentation is due to the argument itself, then the group of doubters would have to be disqualified as being irrational and deluded. Both alternatives seem to be neither rational nor Christian.

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BOOK REVIEWS AND NOTICES

ERIK J. WIELENBERG
DePauw University

Mark Murphy. *God and Moral Law: On the Theistic Explanation of Morality.* Oxford University Press, 2011.

Suppose that God exists; what is the relationship between God and morality? In his sharp new book, Mark Murphy criticizes two prominent ways of answering this question (theological voluntarism and 'standard' natural law theory) and expounds a striking new answer. Along the way, he examines the nature of moral law and moral obligation. Murphy's book constitutes an excellent companion to Robert Adams's masterpiece *Finite and Infinite Goods* as Murphy draws on some aspects of Adams's Platonic theistic approach to ethics while at the same time subjecting Adams's view to insightful criticism. The primary audience for Murphy's book is philosophers interested in theistic ethics, but it (along with Adams's book) ought to be read by anyone interested in meta-ethics, for at least two reasons. First, it includes a number of important claims and arguments about moral laws and moral obligation that, if correct, have implications far beyond theistic ethics. Second, defenders of secular approaches to ethics can learn much by examining the best theistic approaches to ethics and considering their strengths and weaknesses.

To get a sense of the structure of the central argument of *God and Moral Law*, imagine a piece of cotton slowly moving closer and closer to an open flame. When the cotton is very near to the flame, it begins to burn, and eventually is entirely consumed. Suppose that God exists; what role, if any, does God play in this transaction? According to *mere conservationism*, God is responsible for keeping the cotton and the flame in existence, but it is the nature of the cotton and the flame that directly explain the consumption of the former by the latter. One worry about this view is that it does not do justice to God's sovereignty. On this view, God is too much in the background; as Murphy puts it, 'what happens

between the fire and the cotton is ... entirely between the fire and the cotton' (p. 135). According to *occasionalism*, God is the immediate and complete cause of the burning of the cotton; the proximity of the cotton to the flame is merely the occasion for God bringing it about that the cotton burns. This view puts God right at the centre of things and appears to preserve His sovereignty. However, an opposite worry arises for this view, as it appears to imply (implausibly) that the fire does not cause the cotton to burn.

Now imagine some sadistic hooligans bullying a helpless child. This act is morally wrong; it is morally necessary that it not be performed. Again, suppose that God exists; what role, if any, does God play in explaining the moral wrongness of this act? Corresponding to mere conservationism is the view that God is responsible for keeping the act and its wrongness in existence, but it is the natural features of the act itself that morally necessitate that it not be performed. According to Murphy, this is the essence of *standard natural law theory*, and it suffers from the defect of failing to do justice to God's sovereignty. God is too much in the background here; He is not part of the immediate explanation for the wrongness of the act (p. 74). Corresponding to occasionalism is *theological voluntarism*, the view that an act that is (or is partially constituted by) a divine willing is the immediate and complete explanation for the moral wrongness of the act; the natural features of the act are morally inert. But according to Murphy, the view '[t]hat natural facts have no active normative power is on its face deeply objectionable' (p. 119).

Perhaps there is a middle way. In the case of the cotton and the flame, perhaps we should say that the burning of the cotton 'is jointly attributable to God and the fire' (p. 146). Similarly, perhaps in the case of the hooligans and the child, we should say that the moral wrongness of the act is immediately explained both by God and certain natural features of the act itself. The centrepiece of Murphy's book is a working out of this third option, *moral concurrentism* (Murphy takes this to be a version of natural law theory; hence his use of the label '*standard* natural law theory' for the type of natural law theory he rejects).

According to moral concurrentism, 'moral necessitation ... is immediately explained both by God and by creaturely natures', and 'this is not overdetermination, but cooperation: they somehow jointly morally necessitate' (p. 148). But how does this work? To answer that question, Murphy first draws on Adams's suggestion that the goodness of finite

things consists in their resembling God in a particular way. Employing a delectable example that involves Murphy turning into a chicken fried steak (the delicious details of which I won't reveal here; see p. 155), Murphy argues that Adams's view on goodness should be modified so that it says that 'no created thing is simply good; it is always X-ly good (or bad), where the X is filled in by the kind to which the thing belongs ... whenever a being belongs to some kind, then the standards for excellence for that thing are fixed in part by its kind' (p. 159). The resulting view has it that the goodness of finitely good things consists in their 'being like God in ways that belong to the kind to be like God' – a 'theistic Aristotelianism' in contrast with Adams's theistic Platonism. So, on Adams's view, if I taste like a well-prepared chicken fried steak, then this is an excellence in me, whereas on Murphy's view it is not because tasting like a well-prepared chicken fried steak is not an excellence of human being, the kind to which I belong (p. 155).

With this account of goodness in hand, Murphy develops a theory of moral necessitation, a property that, according to Murphy, is closely related to, though perhaps not identical with, moral obligation (see pp. 166-172 for Murphy's discussion of the relationship between moral necessitation and moral obligation). Murphy proposes that moral necessitation is grounded in the goodness and badness of finite things; these goods and evils sometimes 'demand a response' (p. 162). Since the goodness of finite goods consists in their resembling God in a way suitable to their kind, we can say that 'on moral concurrentism all moral necessity is the pull of divine goodness specified by the nature of the creatures involved' (p. 162). In this way, God and creaturely natures cooperate to explain moral necessitation. To return to the case of the sadists bullying the child, the goodness of the child (and/or its life) – its resemblance to God in a way suitable to its kind – morally necessitates that the child not be bullied.

The problem with standard natural law theory is that it implies that 'God is not an immediate explainer of moral necessitation' (p. 164). Moral concurrentism avoids this problem by claiming that what necessitates is *resembling God* in a way suitable to one's kind. The problem with theological voluntarism is it 'excludes creaturely natures from having an immediate explanatory role in moral necessitation' (p. 164). Moral concurrentism avoids this problem by claiming that what necessitates is resembling God *in a way suitable to one's kind*.

As a defender of secular approaches to ethics, I feel some kind of necessitation (perhaps moral, perhaps not) to offer some critical remarks about Murphy's worthy book. To that end, consider the distinction between *intrinsic* and *extrinsic* value, a distinction explored most famously by G.E. Moore. On the Moorean conception, the intrinsic value of a thing is the value it has 'in and of itself' or entirely in virtue of its (non-evaluative) intrinsic properties. Extrinsic value, by contrast, is the value a thing has in virtue of how it is related to other things. It seems to me that the 'in virtue of' relation here is best conceived of as explanatory in nature, so that we can say that when something is intrinsically good, it is the thing's non-evaluative intrinsic properties (or some proper subset thereof) that *make* it good. On this conception of intrinsic goodness, Murphy's view (as well as Adams's) implies that nothing distinct from God is intrinsically good. This is because, on Murphy's (and Adams's) view, the goodness of things distinct from God consists in their standing in a certain relationship to God; their goodness is thus extrinsic rather than intrinsic because it is explained not merely by their intrinsic properties but also by certain properties of God. This points to a possible weakness in Murphy's view. I take it that one way of testing the adequacy of a given theory of morality is to examine how well it accords with our common-sense moral beliefs. While our common-sense moral beliefs are not indefeasible, the fact that a given theory is at odds with such beliefs is a strike against that theory. Indeed, Murphy appears to take such an approach himself. As I noted above, one of his primary criticisms of theological voluntarism is that it implies that 'natural facts have no active normative power' (p. 119). To motivate the implausibility of this claim, Murphy invites the reader to consider the act of harming a harmless child, noting that theological voluntarism 'closes off the good of the child's life from being the, or even a, *wrongmaking* feature of the harming' (p. 118). This looks to be an appeal to our common-sense moral beliefs; specifically, to our belief that the fact that the child's life is good is at least part of what makes it wrong to harm the child. Murphy classifies this objection to theological voluntarism as an 'explanandum-centered' objection (p. 116) in that it alleges that theological voluntarism is unable to explain certain facts about morality (namely, that natural facts are not normatively inert).

I suggest that among our common-sense moral beliefs is the belief that some things distinct from God are intrinsically good: for example, the pleasure of an innocent backrub, or the love between parent and

child. These things, it seems to me, are good in and of themselves. What makes them good, what explains their goodness, lies entirely within their intrinsic nature. If there are such intrinsic goods, then it appears that neither Murphy's nor Adams's theory can account for them, and this is a strike against both theories. This is an explanandum-centred challenge to Adams's and Murphy's accounts of the goodness of finite things.

Whatever the merits of this criticism, Murphy has written a book very much worth reading. By way of conclusion, I should emphasize that the book contains a number of stimulating arguments beyond those I have sketched here. In particular, Murphy offers some novel challenges for standard natural law theory and theological voluntarism that defenders of those approaches will want to consider – though whether Murphy's arguments will 'settle' the theological voluntarists as he suggests they should (p. 132) remains to be seen.

JAMES D. MADDEN
Benedictine College

Charles Taliaferro, Jil Evans. *The Image in Mind: Theism, Naturalism, and the Imagination*. Continuum, 2011.

The Image in Mind: Theism, Naturalism, and the Imagination is an attempt to bring a previously underemphasized consideration to the forefront of the theism-naturalism debate: the comparative aesthetic value of opposed worldviews. The authors, Charles Taliaferro and Jil Evans, endeavour to shift our attention away from the more directly evidential questions that currently dominate the theism vs. naturalism literature toward such questions as 'What is beautiful or ugly, deep or superficial, extravagant or empty, illuminating or stultifying about these images' (p. 1)? Whether naturalism can account for the emergence of specifically aesthetic values is a theme tracked throughout the book, but Taliaferro and Evans are equally interested in the prospects of naturalistic accounts of the emergence of ' ... life, sentience, consciousness, free will, and moral, aesthetic, and religious experience through non-purposive, impersonal forces' (p. 3). They offer substantial discussions of each of these issues, and in doing so they employ an aesthetic mode of evaluation. Despite its relative brevity, *The Image in Mind* competently treats this broad sweep

of issues, but Taliaferro and Evans' most important contribution is the proposal of a novel, aesthetically based, methodology for evaluating competing philosophical perspectives.

Many analytic philosophers are likely to be scandalized by the suggestion of such an aesthetic methodology. Taliaferro and Evans set out to correct this implicit, and largely unreflective, mistrust of aesthetic standards for philosophizing in chapter 1. Marilyn McCord Adams has also suggested that aesthetic evaluations should not be so neatly quarantined from supposedly more properly truth-oriented modes of philosophizing. According to her diagnosis, analytic philosophy's dismissal of aesthetic criteria is an unnecessary consequence of post-positivist attempts to preserve the objectivity of ethics by contrasting it with the supposedly properly subjective realm of aesthetics. (See Marilyn McCord Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), pp. 129-132.) Taliaferro and Evans, however, contend that our recent dismissal of aesthetic criteria runs deeper than a hangover from the excesses of logical positivism in the last century, i.e., it is part and parcel of a general denigration of the role imagination plays in perception, agency, and rationality by even self-avowed anti-positivists that can be traced back to a tension present at the very beginnings of modern philosophy. They contrast the Cambridge Platonists with other early modern philosophers, mainly Descartes and Hobbes, and find that their attitudes toward the imagination are particularly instructive inasmuch as the former, and not the latter, take it that 'imagination can provide a natural means to make explicit and give shape to ideals that are not immediately observed ... ' and thereby ' ... provide an arena in which to explore the good, the true, and the beautiful' (p. 13). This is a stream of early modern thought that the authors trace through Hume, Kant and Coleridge, but they note that this high view of imagination is called into question by Wittgenstein's and Ryle's influential arguments against private language and dualism respectively. Taliaferro and Evans argue that Wittgenstein's private language argument, whatever its broader value might be, fails to undermine the role of imagination in inquiry, because it does not actually establish that humans lack mental images entirely and Wittgenstein himself employs an imaginative method in developing the argument in the *Philosophical Investigations* (pp. 19-21). Likewise, Ryle bases his case against the Cartesian theory of mind by appealing to certain unfortunate images, e.g. 'the ghost in the machine', that he believes dualism foists on us (pp. 21-23).

According to Taliaferro and Evans, there is no reason to doubt our common intuition that imagination plays a significant role in perception, but they go on to argue that imagination plays a much more active role in our knowledge gathering by (a) providing *prima facie* evidence that a certain state of affairs is possible; (b) making explicit what is implicit in our other beliefs; (c) providing a means of pursuing specifically ethical and philosophical inquiry by way of the method of thought experiment; and (d) allowing us to make connections between evidence and challenges to evidence (pp. 24-30). The reader must keep in mind that the notion of 'imagination' in play is not a mere free-association of ideas, but rather ' ... the proposed use of imagination in testing theism and naturalism is one of enlargement of perspective ... rather than substitution' (p. 31). That is, evidentially significant imagination takes us beyond, yet is still grounded in, the data; it is a sort of picturing that allows us to put a body of evidence into a larger or more complete context that fills in the inevitable gaps and limitations in any given body of data. The aesthetic evaluation of these expansive images are what Taliaferro and Evans believe to be evidentially significant, particularly with respect to the assessment of the credibility of theism and naturalism.

In chapter 2, Taliaferro and Evans begin by articulating a mode of the aesthetic evaluation for expansive imagination that is integral even to our scientific inquiries. In particular, 'In science, as in art, one highly valued aesthetic feature is a cognitive, affective completeness or unity' (p. 39). Human beings 'long for unity and wholeness', but our ordinary experiences of the material world are fragmentary or otherwise incomplete. The impetus for inquiry is then our movement to discover a broader unity or wholeness that puts our particular experiences into a coherent picture. That is, we move to complete our fragmentary experience by developing an expansive image. This picture, however, is not merely a free association or substitution of one idea for another, but a *fitting* expansion. Whether an image is indeed fitting to a set of data becomes an evaluative criterion not only in visual arts, but inquiry in general, natural science included: 'These examples from science and the arts demonstrate that in the pursuit to bring the urge for wholeness to fruition, wholeness is achieved by images. Whether or not we are convinced by the images lies in how we believe the image is constructed', i.e. whether the image is fitting (p. 43). That is, 'The link between art and science has been recognized insofar as the criteria for accepting scientific theories [e.g., simplicity] may be cast in aesthetic terms' (p. 46),

and Taliaferro and Evans use Darwin's quasi-aesthetic concerns that helped to lead him to an evolutionary image as a confirmatory case for this claim. This is not to say that aesthetic considerations are primary in scientific inquiry, but only that 'beauty and aesthetic considerations in general have (as a matter of fact) impacted scientific work, and that many elements (imagination and creativity) that enter into artistic practice have their analogue in scientific investigations', and presumably there will likewise be evaluative analogies (ibid.).

At this point in the argument the notion of emergence, i.e., the coming to be of a *sui generis* form or way of being from a prior or more fundamental form, becomes crucial for Taliaferro and Evans. The emergence of novel forms has vast plasticity in the visual arts (and presumably other mediums alike). Nevertheless, even in this context emergence is not without its limits: 'But it is important to realize that the emergent entities are grounded in something that is identifiable; otherwise there would not be a picture of metamorphosis, but a picture of no identities or without intelligible identity of any kind.' (p. 65) That is, in the visual arts, emergence is limited by a fittingness relation, however polymorphous it might be within these limitations, between the emergent form and the ground from which it is derived. Analogously, the fittingness between an emergent form and the metaphysical resources of a broad worldview by which we attempt to account for it then becomes the central aesthetic criterion by which we are to judge theism and naturalism throughout the remainder of *The Image in Mind*. Taliaferro and Evans' treatment of the plausibility of libertarian free will serves as a good example of how this method bears out. On the one hand, they take theism as the view that 'offers an account of the whole cosmos in terms of a good, purposive Creator' (p. 57). On the other hand, naturalism, though it may vary in terms of the strength of the physicalist reduction it proposes, takes the universe as fundamentally free of purpose or ultimate direction because natural science is the ultimate arbiter of truth and 'appeals to theism or souls are scientifically inscrutable and thus not acceptable' (p. 48). The authors then use a familiar argument from Galen Strawson to show that libertarian freedom is not at all plausible given a strongly reductivist version of naturalism, and they argue that attempts by non-reductivist naturalists, e.g., Unger and Searle, to give emergentist accounts of libertarian freedom are generally unpromising. Thus, there is not much of a 'fit' between libertarian free will and a naturalistic worldview. In theism, however, we have an image wherein freedom is much more at

home: 'Consciousness and freedom do not emerge as a radical break in an impersonal cosmos. At the heart of reality, God is conscious and free.' (p. 60) If we are inclined to take fittingness, even in an aesthetic sense, as a criterion for evaluation, theism would seem to have an edge.

In chapter 3 Taliaferro and Evans extend their application of the methodology of aesthetic fit to the coming to be of a well-ordered, contingent universe and the emergence of consciousness. After offering plausible replies to standard naturalist objections to the intelligibility of theism and dismissals of the significance of the 'cosmic question', they argue that, whereas theism has ready answers as to why a contingent universe exists, ' ... naturalism is only able to give us the blunt answer that there is no deeper account as to why the cosmos exists or continues in being' (p. 71). Moreover, the authors claim that the fine-tuning of the physical constants of the universe that makes the emergence of living beings possible likewise constitutes an aesthetically pleasing fit with theism, and it is difficult to say the same for naturalism. Taliaferro and Evans argue that strict naturalists, e.g. Daniel Dennett, would have us 'either posit a miracle or face the explanation from below, in which the intentional dissolves and is accounted by the non-intentional' (p. 80). One worries, however, that Dennett's position amounts to an elimination rather than an explanation of consciousness, and it is therefore untenable because 'the reality of conscious experience is more foundational than the most certain posits of science' (p. 87). Moreover, theistic accounts of the coming to be of consciousness need not be so starkly *ad hoc*, so long as one is willing to countenance the plausibility of theistic evolution, according to which biologically necessary conditions for consciousness are the products of an evolutionary process, even if no ultimate scientific explanation of consciousness can be given (p. 101). In chapter 4 Taliaferro and Evans continue their anti-reductionist program by arguing against naturalistic attempts to eliminate (or reduce beyond significance) animal minds and they argue that recognition of minds (both those had by humans and lower animals) entails values that do not fit well with naturalism.

Chapter 5 begins with the admission that the seeming occurrence of unredeemable evils and the apparent silence or hiddenness of God constitute 'a deep philosophical and theological problem of emergence' particularly for the theist (p. 149). Before addressing this apparent misfit between theism and the reality of evil, Taliaferro and Evans make the point that naturalism cannot account for the sense that many

people have that evil is not merely meaningless, but a violation or loss of a way things ought to have otherwise been. Since naturalism denies fundamental purpose as a feature of the universe, it does not fit with the apparent fact that 'Tragedy is marked by lamentation and destruction, to say something is tragic is to recognize the value of loss' (p. 159). As to whether theism, despite initial appearances, can fit with evil, Taliaferro and Evans introduce and develop some of the standard theodicies appealing to natural order and free will as necessary conditions for the good of responsible agency. They are careful, however, to note that a truly satisfying account of evil for the theist must be done ' ... in light of redemption rather than justification', i.e., the theist should seek not only to show how God could possibly allow certain evils, but further explain how he overcomes them. This task, however, draws us into the centre of incarnational theology and speculation about postmortem reward. Taliaferro and Evans take up these very issues in chapter 6, in which they speculate regarding the use of imagination in forming a plausible picture of the afterlife and develop a *Christus Victor* theory of the atonement.

Some of the technical philosophical issues that are addressed along the way are dealt with a bit more quickly than some critical readers might prefer, but Taliaferro and Evans' treatment of these matters is suggestive enough that even their opponents will find much that is worthy to consider. This is also to be expected in a book which straddles very well the line between specialized scholarship and appeal to a broader readership. That being said, I have just two relatively minor points by way of criticism. (a) Some advocates of naturalistic emergence accounts of consciousness have not seen the *prima facie* appearance of 'misfit' between the supposedly emergent phenomena and its physical origin as particularly troublesome. Timothy O'Connor (see *Persons and Causes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 108-125) argues that many well-established causal relations, though they may turn out to be metaphysically necessary, are initially surprising or even counterintuitive. Some critical treatment of this particular way of defending naturalistic emergence would be helpful. (b) Among its many virtues, the most significant contribution by *The Image in Mind* is the development of the aesthetic mode of evaluation for philosophical theories. At times it is unclear as to how an appeal to aesthetic fit is actually distinct from the sort of inferences to the best explanation already quite frequently employed in science, philosophy, and common life. It might be the case that Taliaferro and Evans' point is that this ubiquitous mode of argument

has an irreducible aesthetic element, but I would welcome a more detailed methodological account along these lines. Do not allow these minor concerns to mar what is an important contribution to the existing literature on the theism and naturalism debate.

LOGAN PAUL GAGE
Franciscan University of Steubenville

David O'Connor. *God, Evil, and Design: An Introduction to the Philosophical Issues*. Blackwell, 2008.

Given that many standard texts on the problem of evil are often too technical for undergraduates, this new introduction by Seton Hall's David O'Connor is a welcome addition to the literature. What is more, it helpfully pairs a discussion of the problem of evil with consideration of design in nature (which discussion of the problem of evil naturally evokes) with the goal of seeing if an inference to God's existence is rational overall.

O'Connor admirably cajoles students into their own philosophical inquiry rather than passive reading. However, he (unhelpfully) asks students to shed their biases and pretend that they are behind a Rawlsian veil of ignorance regarding their own religious affiliations. Judgments will differ, but to this reviewer it would be better for students to reflect upon their biases rather than pretend they do not exist. After all, if we are so biased that we cannot deliberate reasonably about God and evil, how will we be able to successfully pretend to be impartial arbiters?

God, Evil, and Design certainly wears its introductory nature on its sleeve. One assumes that even freshman do not need to be reminded twice in five pages that the great monotheistic religions are Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. O'Connor spends a whole chapter laying out the basic terminology necessary for the discussion: moral versus natural evil, the basic properties of the God of classical theism, and various understandings of the relationship between faith and reason. Chapter three opens with eight pages explaining logical contradiction, an idea that could surely be explained in a paragraph. The chief culprit here is O'Connor's style of providing abundant examples and thought experiments. While defining terms up front can be helpful, the effect is that the central ideas do not even begin to appear until halfway through chapter three.

But with some basics out of the way, O'Connor first considers J. L. Mackie's famous logical argument from evil. He ably details the structure of Mackie's argument and the assumptions it embodies. Then follows a critique of Mackie via Plantinga's free will defence. Again, the burdens of Plantinga's argument, and hence the dialectic itself, are extremely lucid. It should be crystal clear to students, for instance, that Plantinga need only point to a possible world where God and evil coexist to defeat the logical version of the argument from evil.

Readers are even treated to both Mackie's rebuttal that God could have created a world only populated by those with libertarian freedom who would never choose evil and Plantinga's 'transworld depravity' response (i.e., it is logically possible that each free person would sin at least once). O'Connor's explication is only hampered by repeated use of the concept of 'proof' (where 'reasonable argument' would do) and the fact that readers are given O'Connor's verdicts but not told about the current consensus of the discipline.

Instead of moving directly to the evidential problem of evil, O'Connor pauses, spending two chapters exploring how nature's apparent design should affect our overall judgments concerning God's existence and his goodness. If nature is designed, then by his lights it was intended, planned, and brought about by an intelligent agent. O'Connor thinks we regularly observe the complex, orderly nature of nature. And, in our everyday experience, 'means-to-ends behaviour often reflects intention and purpose' (p. 77). But, in the realm of organisms, Darwin's theory of natural selection undercuts this inference to intelligence. After all, 'natural selection is not deliberate or chosen' by an agent (p. 79).

As is fashionable, O'Connor dumps on the modern intelligent design movement without truly considering its arguments. O'Connor puts little effort into explaining the ideas of biochemist Michael Behe before telling us that philosopher of science Michael Ruse disagrees with him. Apparently, a U.S. judge concurred with Michael Ruse and settled their dispute. What magisterial authority or qualifications the judge has for resolving delicate issues of science and philosophy, O'Connor does not say. Disappointing as this is for both ID supporters (who want their arguments fairly described) and Darwinists (who want ID soundly refuted), O'Connor adopts Richard Swinburne's strategy of side-stepping the issue of biological design in favour of cosmological considerations: life's emergence depends on finely tuned laws of nature, and evolution neither explains these laws nor the existence of a finite universe.

Though not without its own problems (which are explored in the subsequent chapter), O'Connor agrees with Swinburne that a 'personal explanation' for the universe and its laws is preferable to both the chance and multiverse hypotheses (p. 86). However, given that there are many seemingly pointless evils, O'Connor thinks 'the only reasonable and plausible conclusion' at this point is that this source of the universe is either indifferent or not wholly good (p. 106). 'The fact of evil blocks a conclusion that the original source of natural order is perfectly good', he boldly asserts (p. 108). Any other conclusion is 'unjustified' (p. 108). But surely even as a provisional conclusion this moves too fast. It would seem the better part of wisdom, instead, to minimally claim that one would seem rational in concluding that God exists based upon the evidence of design but also that God might not be perfectly good based upon the evidence of seemingly pointless evil.

In the second half of the book O'Connor introduces probabilistic arguments from evil. First, he conveys Paul Draper's argument that the hypothesis that the universe is indifferent is more probable than theism with respect to seemingly pointless evil; for, seemingly pointless evil is more surprising on theism than on the indifference hypothesis. Second, he relays William Rowe's argument: the fact that we can think of no plausible reasons which justify God's allowance of suffering makes it more probable than not that there is no such justification and hence that God does not exist. O'Connor spends the rest of the book describing and evaluating two sorts of defences – what he calls 'technicality defences' and 'substantive defences' (p. 129). (The former are standardly called 'defences' and the latter 'theodicies'.)

By the (somewhat prejudicial) term 'technicality defences' he has in mind sceptical theism. O'Connor describes the sceptical defences of both Stephen Wykstra and Peter van Inwagen in an admirably non-technical fashion. Wykstra's well-known argument claims that one is only justified in thinking that something does not exist only if one's evidence is such that, were that thing to exist, one would expect to see it. For example, one cannot justifiably claim that there are no fleas in one's garage, O'Connor notes, if one has only stood at the door and looked. One would not expect to see fleas from that distance. Similarly, Wykstra argues that Rowe is wrong to conclude that probably there is no justification for some evils just because Rowe cannot think of any plausible justifications. Wykstra thinks Rowe is not in the best epistemic position to judge.

Similarly, van Inwagen seeks to provide a story which is compatible with God's existence and the amount of evil we see – a story which is true for all anyone knows. He imagines a Garden of Eden where people lived in harmony with each other and had supernatural powers by which they avoided even natural evil. But when they freely chose to sin, God initiated a rescue plan. For this plan to succeed, people have to realize how devastating it is to fall out of fellowship with God. Thus some amount of evil is necessary. Further, van Inwagen claims, there may be objective vagueness here: there may be no exact amount of evil, relative to this redemptive plan, which is too great or too little. In this way, van Inwagen challenges the arguments of those who claim that there is too much evil and thus God does not exist.

O'Connor finds the arguments of both Wykstra and van Inwagen wanting. He raises serious questions about Sceptical Theism – for instance, whether it implies a scepticism which also rules out natural theology – but overall O'Connor fails to give it its due. He reduces Wykstra's argument to the thesis that theism makes no difference to the world. He writes:

> But we should not be surprised to find the world being the way it is if God exists, and we should not be surprised to find the world being the way it is if God does not exist. Either way, we should not be surprised. We should not expect God to make a discernible difference. We should not expect commonsense standards to work when we think about God and evil. That is the essence of Wykstra's noseeum defence. (p. 146)

Yet that does not at all seem the essence of Wykstra's defence. At its core, rather, is Wykstra's 1984 CORNEA (Condition of Reasonable Epistemic Access) principle, an attempt to formulate when it is justifiable to infer 'probably there is no X' from 'we see no X'. CORNEA proposes that we can do so 'only when X has "reasonable seeability" – that is, is the sort of thing which, if it exists, we can reasonably expect to see in the situation' (Stephen John Wykstra, 'Rowe's Noseeum Arguments from Evil', in Daniel Howard-Snyder, ed., *The Evidential Argument from Evil* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996), p. 126). Wykstra's chief observation is that such inferences are legitimate in some instances but not others. Thus he seeks to formulate the epistemic principle at work. O'Connor fails to wrestle with CORNEA let alone formulate his own principle. Wykstra is not saying theism makes no difference to how the world appears. He is only claiming that it may not be the case that

we should expect to see God-justifying goods clearly connected to each act of evil.

O'Connor attacks van Inwagen's defence with numerous charges. For instance, given that van Inwagen has argued that God may not be able to prevent every evil via miraculous intervention without creating massive disruptions in the natural order, O'Connor wonders how it is that van Inwagen's imagined Garden of Eden (where people have preternatural powers to avoid natural evil) does not lead to massive disruptions in the natural order. And given that van Inwagen is fond of pointing out vagueness problems for others, O'Connor argues that van Inwagen faces his own: 'specificity is needed regarding the cut-off point, below which miracles [by the humans in van Inwagen's garden scenario] do not cause massive disruption' (p. 159). There is a good question here, but given the dialectic, it is not clear that van Inwagen needs a response. His is a defence, not an affirmative vision of the world. As such, the fact that his garden scenario is not obviously incoherent may be enough to show that the inference from the existence of suffering to the likelihood that there is no God is questionable. O'Connor also questions whether it is fair that the abuse of free will in van Inwagen's Garden was met with the horrors of disease and natural disasters. Here O'Connor misses that in van Inwagen's scenario suffering is not meant for punishment but for rescue: suffering reminds us of the horror of disunion with God; it can disrupt our dangerous contentment with this life and lead us back to our true good.

O'Connor concludes that these two sceptical defences are unsuccessful. This only highlights a serious deficiency of the book: *God, Evil, and Design* contains numerous controversial conclusions. O'Connor is certainly entitled to his opinions. But this makes the book much less helpful in an introductory setting where students need to learn and wrestle with the basic arguments.

Because sceptical responses to arguments from evil fail in his judgment, O'Connor concludes the book with a consideration of two theodicies (or in his terminology, 'substantive defences'). One had hoped O'Connor would treat readers to a careful exposition of John Hick's soul-making theodicy and Richard Swinburne's free will defence. Instead, O'Connor immediately peppers the free will defence with countless possible problems without any attempt to respond: *Shouldn't God have restrained Hitler? Can't God reduce the range of our choices without eliminating free will?* The summary of soul-making is even worse. O'Connor reduces this

theodicy to the claim that without evil consequences to our actions we would never know that we are able to cause good and evil. There is no consideration of the great good of the virtuous soul or how suffering grows character like little else. All in all, O'Connor spends much more time dismissing these defences than explaining them to newcomers.

Even though most of the chapter which was to explain greater-good theodicies was devoted to interrogating them, there follows an entire chapter critical of such theodicies. Repeatedly, O'Connor probes our moral intuitions by asking how we would govern the world in a given situation (if our child were dying, etc.). While such thought experiments are certainly worthwhile, O'Connor appears not to have given serious thought to the fact that God may bear a different relationship to us than we do to our children. Locke, for instance, maintained that we are God's property.

In his final judgment, while theism cannot be dismissed neither can it be justifiably inferred from nature's design, even without consideration of evil. Given the strong nature of this conclusion, it is highly surprising that he did not spend much time discussing particular theistic arguments, both cosmological and biological. 'Our verdict overall', he writes, 'is that the enormous amounts of seemingly pointless evils give us sufficient evidence to think that, probably, there is no God' (p. 212). Theistic belief is not dismissed, but it is certainly seen as unwarranted. O'Connor even claims that his verdicts are the result of 'religiously neutral philosophical investigation', though one might wonder if there is such a thing (p. 213).

O'Connor notes that the believer might still try to take refuge in religious experience as the basis of her faith. He is somewhat sympathetic to this position, writing, 'perhaps it can be reasonable for the believer [with religious experience(s)] to see evil as a mystery, without seeing it as sufficient negative evidence to warrant unbelief' (p. 220). Yet O'Connor insists that such 'supporting [religious] experiences are not evidence' (p. 216). For many leading evidentialists (e.g., Conee and Feldman), however, evidence consists in experiences or their associated mental states. On this plausible view it is difficult to see why (supposedly) religious experiences or the mental states derived from them are not every bit as much prima facie evidence as other sorts of experiences or their attendant mental states. Thus it is highly contentious that O'Connor takes 'evidence' to be equivalent to 'public evidence'.

If I were to use *God, Evil, and Design* in an undergraduate course, I would (1) choose readings directly from Swinburne and Hick rather

than use O'Connor's last section, and (2) have students read specific design arguments and replies. Despite these reservations, this work is a great reminder of the value of philosophy of religion in an introductory context: serious discussion of God, evil, and design touches on issues of modal logic, free will and determinism, epistemic justification, and so much more.

JOSHUA FARRIS
University of Bristol

Jerry L. Walls. *Purgatory: The Logic of Total Transformation*. Oxford University Press, 2012.

In a time when most would consider the doctrine of purgatory as problematic and medieval, Jerry L. Walls rehabilitates the doctrine for the purpose of contemporary discussion. As a philosopher in the Protestant and Wesleyan tradition, Walls brings fresh eyes to the doctrine of purgatory that is often associated with Roman Catholicism. In the spirit of C.S. Lewis, Walls offers us a feast of thoughts on purgatory that logically and coherently link salvation and sanctification in this world to glorification in the next. *Purgatory* is also the culmination of a series of works Walls has written on the afterlife with *Hell: The Logic of Damnation* and *Heaven: The Logic of Joy*.

As to the structure of the work, Walls proceeds from the historical, the philosophical, to a contemporary construction of the doctrine of purgatory by drawing from C.S. Lewis on salvation and purgatory. The aim of the book is to assess the logic of the doctrine of purgatory and provide a view that has ecumenical promise not only to Roman Catholics, but to the rest of the Christian tradition – the Orthodox Church and the Protestant Church. In chapter 1, Walls offers a short canvassing of historical views on purgatory. Walls proceeds to look at objections from his tradition in chapter 2. In chapter 3, he offers various models of purgatory, broadly including Satisfaction Models and Sanctification Models. In chapters 4 and 5, he considers the problem of personal identity in purgatory, specifically the notion of stability and change, and the possibility of a 'second chance' for those who did not accept the satisfaction offered in Christ. The last two chapters include a constructive proposal of purgatory that is ecumenical in nature and a summing up of findings.

Walls explores the rationale and ground for the vision of God after somatic death. Walls argues that this is non-negotiable in the Christian tradition. We cannot go before God with an unholy character, but we must have a nature that is without sin. This is true if for no other reason than the fact that we cannot see God in all of his holiness without ourselves being holy. There is reason to think that when humans die, specifically those who have been 'redeemed', they are in fact not holy or perfect. If this is true in conjunction with the belief that we, as believers, will see God when we die, then an ensuing dilemma arises. The former precludes the latter. Walls considers four options on the nature of persons in heaven. We may enter the afterlife with imperfections, believers may not ever find their way to God, we may be instantaneously transformed at death or we are cleansed in purgatory prior to entering heaven (p. 6). The last two are the only feasible solutions that Walls considers throughout the book. The manner in which he develops a case in favour of purgatory is worth considering. To this we now turn.

Walls begins his case by establishing the foundation for the discussion in Scripture and in history – this is the first highlight. He makes apparent that the Scriptural case in favour of purgatory is slim, but that the logic is implicit within Scripture that is later teased out by Divines within Christian tradition (p. 13). He also mentions the Scriptural ground for thinking there are differing regions between heaven and hell that establish the possibility for purgatory. One example he cites is from the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus where Lazarus is portrayed as being in hell temporarily and others are temporarily in Abraham's bosom (p. 13). However, this is clearly a teaching that favours the doctrine of the intermediate state between somatic death and physical resurrection. That interim period seems to be a designated period of time and can be readily interpreted as somewhere on the earth that we presently experience. Nonetheless, this does open up a slim possibility that Scripture is not closed to the notion of purgatory, but I must emphasize its *slim possibility*. Later he refers to Divines that support the doctrine of purgatory and further develop the notion – one notable supporter is Augustine. Augustine is noteworthy for influencing the notion of three states in the afterlife that correspond to three kinds of persons in the afterlife. The three categories of persons and states in the afterlife include those who are wicked in hell, those who are not ready for heaven in purgatory, and the blessed in heaven (p. 16).

In this chapter, Walls notes the influential motivations for the development of the doctrine of purgatory and some initial reasons for rejecting it. The rise of the doctrine of purgatory is due to five influences within Church history, which include: social/economic factors, the rise in thinking about morality in terms of proportionality, a growth in thinking about justice, the shift in thinking after the 12th century to the intermediate state and, finally, the general consensus that pain has some desirable effects on moral formation (pp. 20-21). In terms of its rejection, Walls is quick to point out that a dismissal of it is due to its lack of Scriptural support, its abuses in medieval Christianity and its potential undermining of Christ's work on the cross. Walls argues that there may be reason to think that Scripture does not exclude the doctrine of purgatory. He also argues that while it may have been abused this in no way undermines the doctrine as potentially true. The doctrine of Christ's work is taken up in the next chapter.

A second highlight of *Purgatory* is found in chapter 3, the 'Models of Purgatory'. Here, Walls develops two broad categories of thinking about purgatory. This is essential for understanding the rest of his argument in the book. Walls develops what is called the satisfaction model and the sanctification model of purgatory. He argues that a satisfaction model has little to offer by way of establishing a common ground suitable for all sects of Christianity to unite, but that the sanctification model provides us with a suitably robust conception of the doctrine of purgatory that avoids contradicting theological essentials found in Eastern Orthodoxy or Protestantism. The logic of purgatory on the sanctification model is to finish the process of making persons actually holy. This is not to say that the person is not legally justified before God or not acceptable in God's mind, but that he is not *actually* righteous (p. 61). This model, arguably, does nothing to undermine the work of Christ but emphasizes what is often referred to as the 'subjective' aspects of redemption. Another way of looking at this is in terms of perception. There is a sense in which if our characters have not been suitably developed toward a good we will not have a suitable nature to enjoy a particular good. I may know and be committed to the fact that exercise is good for my physical body, but until I have suitably conditioned my body exercise is just painful. Later, it can become pleasurable. In the same way if my character has not been suitably developed, then there is a sense in which seeing God would be painful, potentially far too painful to endure until I have acquired certain virtues (pp. 82-91). This leads us to another highlight of the book

that is also essential to the argument made in favour of purgatory and it concerns the nature and necessity of time.

In chapter 4, 'Personal Identity, Time and Purgatory', Walls lays out some of the problems concerning the metaphysics of personal identity and its relationship to the doctrine of purgatory by considering variations of materialism, Thomism and substance dualism. He argues that all three are not without problems, but can coherently account for the doctrine of purgatory. Next, Walls discusses the necessity of time as a precondition for subjective transformation predicated upon a moral agent's ability to choose between right and wrong moral actions. Walls assumes a libertarian notion of freedom and argues that meaningful freedom requires that individuals have the ability to choose, such that character development is conditioned upon freedom and causally requires it. Assuming this is true, Walls argues that this seems to assume a notion of time in the afterlife. By arguing for the necessity of time for change, Walls draws from Brown and Charles Taylor in support of the intuition that time is necessary for the development of individual identity (p. 116).

With all that is positive about the reasons a traditional Christian ought to accept the doctrine of purgatory, I am convinced that Walls has not been attentive enough to the intricacies of the Reformed view or a variation within Reformed thought on the afterlife as an adequate alternative to purgatory. In chapter 2, Walls discusses various protestant objections to purgatory from a Lutheran perspective, a Reformed perspective and a Wesleyan perspective. Here I am specifically interested in his treatment of the Reformed perspective and why he may not have given it sufficient attention. In his treatment of Reformed perspectives, Walls relates Reformation teaching to Lutheran teaching in that sanctification is a process of individual mortification of the 'flesh' or that nature that was 'fallen in Adam' and is disposed toward immorality (p. 42). This notion is often referred to as 'progressive sanctification', such that, after being justified on the basis of Christ's atoning work on the cross, the person will over time become holy and weaken the 'flesh' nature and its habits. On page 43, Walls quotes from the Westminster Confession of Faith as support for the notion that after death the 'righteous' persons or persons who have been justified in Christ will be made perfect and will see God prior to the resurrection of the body. This is the 'instantaneous' view referred to earlier whereby God makes the saint perfect upon death. In addition to this, Walls, in the context of discussing Edwards' view, points out what is common to many Reformation views that the body

still has remnants of sin. Throughout this chapter, he portrays this view as 'ad hoc' and degrading to the body (see especially page 45). I wish to respond by saying that I do not think Walls has adequately grasped the Reformed view or at least some variations of it. It seems to me that what many Reformed thinkers have argued for is the notion that at justification there is a subjective transformation or a transformation of the soul likened to the physical resurrection of the body. The soul that has been justified, you might say, has received new 'relations' and new capacities that are disposed toward holiness and perfection. At this moment, the individual who has been redeemed struggles, primarily with the physical correlate of his/her human nature. This does not mean that the body is intrinsically bad or that Gnosticism is being affirmed, as Walls has argued (p. 45). It simply means that the soul has no positive disposition toward evil, but the effects of sin and corruption that are passively received in the body remain – hence the need for physical resurrection. The effects of sin and corruption somehow reside in the body (see Romans 6; see John Calvin, John Murray and Robert Reymond on the matter). This is not to denigrate the body for the soul was in the same position prior to justification and redemption. This pattern is not limited to this situation, either, but is reflected throughout Scriptural teaching on persons. There is always a logical, if not temporal, priority of sin in the soul then the body – assuming substance dualism. Arguably, the individual soul sinned then the body received the effects of sin and corruption. In the same order, the soul receives redemption, then the body as seen in salvation and, finally, physical resurrection.

It seems to me this can undermine the supposed 'ad hoc' nature of an instantaneous perfection. It also may not be accurate to define it as instantaneous for it begins when the person makes a decisive break with his old life and culminates in the afterlife and the completion of human nature at the physical resurrection. Let me make two comments to support this. First, the soul that is cleansed and now righteous is not merely righteous in some judicial sense, but is righteous in some 'real' sense. There is a radical decisive break with the old nature and a new nature that is united to God that is accompanied by new accoutrements directed toward perfection, which follows justification. This does mean that the soul is able to enter into heaven and see God while disembodied. Furthermore, this does not undermine the fact that it generally takes a great deal of time to change our character states. The reality is that some events in life have a greater effect on individuals than the effect of

other events. Additionally, some events that are conditional upon the will set a chain reaction for other changes, which is what I am suggesting concerning this variation of Reformation teaching. Second, one could think of this as some new teleological mechanism that helps bring the soul to fruition after somatic death that is made complete upon the physical resurrection. Additionally, this undermines the objection that the reformed view denigrates the body because it requires the body for the completion of human nature and the completion of redemption. Whilst I and other Protestants may not be opposed in principle and may find much of what Walls argues in favour of Purgatory to be sensible, there is cause for doubt. This doubt is motivated not only by Scripture's silence on the matter and a general disdain toward it within the Protestant tradition but also the fact that there is another solution that is rational and coherent to affirm. Another comment is in order concerning a Reformed inclination to affirm a compatibilistic view of freedom. I do not see why someone in the Protestant-Reformed tradition could hold something similar to what is outlined above on a libertarian view of freedom.

On a more speculative note, while humans who have been redeemed are holy, righteous and perfect it may also be the case that humans continue growing in righteousness and perfection. This would seem to allow for degrees, which correspond to degrees in heaven that are, arguably, spoken of in Scripture (see 2 Corinthians 12) or degrees of seeing and experiencing God that correspond metaphysically to our natures. This may assume that 'time' is real in the afterlife and that human persons are not simply passive recipients, but human persons who are actually involved in the whole process of redemption.

It seems Walls has made a good philosophical case for purgatory that is consistent with the core teachings of Eastern Orthodoxy and Protestantism. Having said this, there is still reason to affirm an immediate-glorification-at-somatic-death view as biblically viable and intellectually respectable. In the end, the doctrine of purgatory is rationally acceptable and logically consistent, but it is not the only option in town.