Philosophy of Religion As Hermeneutics of Contemplation According to Dewi Z. Phillips

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Abstract

Dewi Z. Phillips maintains that philosophy must have a contemplative character. Applied to religion, it takes the form of a hermeneutics of contemplation that emphasizes the role concepts play in human life. While some philosophers try to bring philosophy to bear on to religion, others try to bring religion to bear on to philosophy; seeing their task as being for or against religion. According to Phillips, both these views are confused. Instead, the philosophy of religion must strive to understand religion on its own terms: showing that a sensibility should be possible that does justice to both belief and atheism. In order to appreciate Phillips' philosophy of religion, it is essential to recognize the three authors that have contributed to his thinking: Ludwig Wittgenstein, Søren Kierkegaard, and Simone Weil. From Wittgenstein, Phillips learns the philosophical method, Kierkegaard teaches Phillips what it means to be a religious author, and Simone Weil imparts Phillips with an authentic sense of religious belief and understanding. Throughout his career Phillips has been poorly understood because he refuses to be pinned down to the categories and frameworks within which philosophers of religion and theologians traditionally define themselves. For Phillips, a contemplative conception of the philosophy of religion endeavours to show just how far philosophy can bring one in a religious dimension: trying to enable a person to be conceptually clear about the matters at hand and to realize when a personal judgment must be made.

Résumé

Selon Dewi Z. Phillips, la philosophie doit avoir un caractère contemplatif. Concernant la religion, cela doit prendre la forme d'une herméneutique contemplative qui souligne le rôle que les concepts jouent dans la vie. Plusieurs philosophes tentent d'intéresser la philosophie à la religion, d'autres d'intéresser la religion à la philosophie, tout en pensant être pour ou contre la religion. D'après Phillips, ces deux positions sont inexactes. La philosophie de la religion doit plutôt comprendre la religion selon ses propres termes et montrer qu'il est possible de faire justice à la foi aussi bien qu'à l'athéisme. Pour comprendre la philosophie de la religion de Phillips, il est très important de prendre connaissance des trois penseurs qui ont contribué à sa pensée: Ludwig Wittgenstein, Søren Kierkegaard, et Simone Weil. De Wittgenstein, Phillips prend la méthode philosophique; Kierkegaard l'aide à comprendre ce qu'est un auteur religieux; Simone Weil lui communique le sens authentique de la foi et de l'expérience religieuse. Tout au long de sa carrière, Phillips a été mal compris à cause de son refus de se limiter aux catégories et modèles de la philosophie de la religion traditionnelle. Selon Phillips, la conception contemplative de la philosophie de la religion met à l'épreuve ce que la philosophie peut exposer de la dimension religieuse; elle permet aussi d'adopter une conception éclairée et de savoir quand une décision personelle doit être prise.

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Abbreviations*

for works by

Dewi Z. Phillips [P], Ludwig Wittgenstein [Wi], Søren Kierkegaard [K], and Simone Weil [We]

BCFL	[P]	"Belief, Change and Forms of Life." 1981.
CoP	[P]	*The Concept of Prayer*. 1965.
CoUP	[K]	*Concluding Unscientific Postscript* [1846]. 1944.
CuV	[Wi]	*Culture and Value*. 1980.
EiO	[K]	*Either/Or* [1843]. 1946.
FaFo	[P]	*Faith after Foundationalism*. 1988.
FPE	[P]	*Faith and Philosophical Enquiry*. 1970.
GrG	[We]	*Gravity and Grace* [1947]. 1952.
LeCo	[Wi]	*Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*. 1966.
LeP	[We]	*Lectures on Philosophy* [1959]. 1978.
OnW	[P]	"On Wittgenstein." 2001.
PhCP	[P]	*Philosophy's Cool Place*. 1999.
PhI	[Wi]	*Philosophical Investigations* [1953]. 2001.
PoV	[K]	*The Point of View for my Work as an Author* [1848]. 1939.
PTC	[P]	"Philosophy and Theological Castles." 2003.
RePA	[P]	"Religion, Philosophy and the Academy." 1998.
RRC	[P]	*Recovering Religious Concepts*. 2000.
WR	[P]	*Wittgenstein and Religion*. 1993.

* See bibliography, pp. 106-29. – For other abbreviations, see Siegfried M. Schwertner, *International Glossary of Abbreviations for Theology and Related Subjects*. Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1992, xli + 488p.

Introduction

The nature of the philosophy of religion is itself a matter of philosophical dispute. Accordingly, some try to bring philosophy to bear on to religion, while others try to bring religion to bear on to philosophy; seeing their task as being for or against religion. Dewi Zephaniah Phillips (1934 - ...) thinks that both of these views are confused. He believes that the philosophy of religion must strive to understand religion on its own terms. The only way this can be achieved is by upholding a contemplative conception of philosophy. This understanding is greatly influenced by Ludwig Wittgenstein, who believes that philosophical problems are the products of a particular lack of clarity in the way they were formulated, and that this lack of clarity has its roots in confused ways of extracting sense from language. Today, Phillips is regarded as the leading representative of Wittgenstein's religious influence on the philosophy of religion. In fact, he is the editor of a major journal, *Philosophical Investigations*, which takes its name and its orientation from Wittgenstein's most famous work.

Phillips' contemplative conception of philosophy refuses to associate contemplation with contemporary vulgarizations of the concept, where it is thought of as an easy, unearned serenity. The philosophical contemplation he summons "demands a *kind* of attention to our surroundings that we are reluctant to give them because of the hold which certain ways of thinking have on us. These ways of thinking have us captive, not against our wills, but because of them" (PhCP 2). Philosophy, as such, is the most general discipline of all, since it is not concerned with the reality of this and that but with the nature of reality as a whole.

Over the past forty years D. Z. Phillips has been a prolific writer and contributor to philosophy. The recent publication in 2002 of *The Possibilities of Sense: Essays in Honour of D. Z. Phillips*[1] is a testimony to that fact. The book focuses on Phillips' contribution to ethics, the philosophy of religion, and the philosophy of literature and education. However, it is in the philosophy of religion that he has had the greatest impact, "where his views are widely known yet poorly understood."[2] For these reasons Phillips has been labelled a "Wittgensteinian fideist", a revisionist, an atheist, a relativist, a non-realist, and, understandably with all these labelling attempts, an elusive philosopher. In his article, "D.Z. Phillips: The Elusive Philosopher" Gavin Hyman writes, "Of all the philosophers of religion, D. Z. Phillips must be one of the most frequently misunderstood, and this in spite of his lucid and compelling style of writing."[3] Confusions arise because Phillips does not allow himself to be pinned down to the categories and frameworks within which philosophers of religion and theologians have traditionally understood and defined themselves.

As Phillips sees it, philosophy does not play a role in grounding religious claims; for example, in proving that religious beliefs refer or do not refer to a genuine reality, or that religious arguments qualify or do not qualify as rational justifications. However, the assumption that philosophers must appraise religious claims in such a way belongs to the heart of traditional philosophy of religion that Phillips vehemently protests. Thus, when Phillips writes about the groundlessness of religious belief, his critics assume that he is making a negative judgment, as if he were criticizing religious claims for lacking logical features. On the contrary, he means to show that the rational standards appropriate to

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[1] Ed. John H. Whittaker. New York: Palgrave, 2002.
[2] Ibid., p. xiv.
[3] Published in Theology 102 (July/August 1999 – No. 808) 271.

others types of belief are not appropriate to most religious beliefs, and that the indiscriminate attempt to justify religious claims by these inappropriate standards distorts the very meaning of religious ideas. However, after stating this claim, other critics assume that Phillips shields all religious claims from criticism. Again, this cannot be further from the truth, since he recognizes the dynamic roles religious and atheistic beliefs have in the lives of human beings. Hence Phillips' insistence that religion takes place *in* a form of life. Accordingly, as Richard Messer notes, "Phillips always uses examples rather than generalizations in order to make a point, and will quote as frequently from literature as from philosophy."[4] Phillips simply wants people to see religious claims for what they are, so that they may become aware of the ways that these claims are distorted in the effort to be philosophically critical about them. John H. Whittaker states, Phillips "cannot be accurately described as either a friend or foe of religion, except in so far as it lies in the interest of religion to have its teachings understood in a logically discriminating way."[5]

The first two chapters of this study present the philosophical debate Phillips has inevitably found himself in. The first chapter pertains to the first half of Phillips' career in the philosophy of religion from his first burst onto the scene in 1965 with *The Concept of Prayer* to the publication of *Faith after Foundationalism* in 1988. During this time Phillips had to fend off critics' attacks who just do not seem to understand his philosophical point of view. The second chapter examines two seminal works of his in the last decade, namely "Religion, Philosophy, and the Academy" (1998) and "Philosophy and Theological Castles" (2003). Though the semantical content of his

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[4] R. Messer, *Does God's Existence Need Proof?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 43.
[5] *The Possibilities of Sense: Essays in Honour of D. Z. Phillips*, ed. John H. Whittaker (New York: Palgrave, 2002), p. xiv.

critics has changed somewhat, Phillips has remained steadfast to his understanding of the contemplative character of the philosophy of religion.

Phillips' philosophical methodology has been predominantly shaped by three great authors: Ludwig Wittgenstein, Søren Kierkegaard, and Simone Weil. The last three chapters are an analysis of Phillips' understanding of these three thinkers. Through the philosophical teachings of Wittgenstein, Phillips gains his understanding of the philosophical method and how it can be applied to religion. From Kierkegaard, he learns the challenges that religion poses to philosophy in recalling the type of category religious concepts are. With Simone Weil, he finds one that not only has a deep religious faith, but is able to express what such a faith must entail.

Phillips' contemplative conception of the philosophy of religion endeavours to show just how far philosophy can bring one in a religious dimension. It tries not to sway a person in one direction or another, but to enable a person to be conceptually clear about the matters at hand and to realize when a personal judgement must be made.

Chapter One

Setting the Philosophical Context

In *The Concept of Prayer* (1965) Dewi Z. Phillips begins by identifying what he thinks the central problems might be within the field of the philosophy of religion. He compares work in this field to working on the Tower of Babel: it cannot be readily assumed one's colleagues understand what the other is saying. At least with the Tower of Babel, the builders were engaged in a common task, whereas for the philosophers of religion "the nature and purpose of their subject is itself a philosophical controversy" (CoP 1). As a result, Phillips believes it essential to suggest what he thinks philosophy can say about religion. On the very first page he appeals to what Ludwig Wittgenstein says about the nature of a philosophical problem:

> A philosophical problem has the form: 'I don't know my way about.'
> Philosophy may in no way interfere with the actual use of language; it can in the end only describe it.
> For it cannot give any foundation either.
> It leaves everything as it is. (PhI § 123-4)

Though Wittgenstein is speaking of philosophy in general, Phillips wants to recall this idea specifically to philosophers of religion. Once applied to religion, what Wittgenstein is saying is that if a philosopher wants to give an account of religion, he or she must regard what religious believers do and say. What is fundamental to note is that Wittgenstein is not equating a philosophical account of religion with the account a believer might give of his or her beliefs. A philosophical account is, after all, a conceptual account rather than a descriptive account. Phillips uses the example of a religious believer who is asked to give an account of prayer. The believer is asked not to recite the prayers he or she uses in the form of a descriptive account, but to give a

conceptual account of the type of activity prayer is. Specifically, the enquirer wants to know what it *means* to pray. Facing such a request, Phillips notes, the believer is often lost. He compares (p. 2) the situation to the famous example from Augustine's *Confessions*, book XI, 14:

> For what is time? Who can readily and briefly explain this? Who can even in thought comprehend it, so as to utter a word about it? But what in discourse do we mention more familiarly and knowingly than time? And, we understand, when we speak of it; we understand also, when we hear it spoken by another. What then is time? If no one asks me, I know: if I wish to explain it to one that asketh, I know not.

While praying believers know what they are doing; yet when asked to give an account of prayer, to say what prayer means to them, they no longer know their way about. The difficulty, Phillips suggests, is that one is asking for a non-religious account of a religious activity. Therein lies the problem, for a conceptual or philosophical account that would give some indication of the meaning of prayer would not signify much to someone for whom prayer means little, and more often then not the believer fails to provide an adequate one. Phillips relates this situation to the novelist who may know what he or she is doing while writing a novel; yet it does not follow that the novelist will have anything valuable to say about the idea of literature.

Turning to religious believers who accept the challenge and attempt to give conceptual accounts of prayer, Phillips asks: must philosophers accept what the believer says as true? Clearly not, since the philosopher would then be left with a mass of contradictory accounts. How is one to distinguish good accounts from bad ones? Referring back to Wittgenstein's notion, the ultimate appeal must be made to the actual usage itself, namely, to the activity of praying. Phillips remarks that Wittgenstein's point is that the *meaning* of prayer is in the *activity* of praying. The difficulty arises for the

philosopher in trying to make philosophically explicit what is already known in a non-philosophical, religious way. "The conceptual accounts of the believer must be judged on the grounds of whether they accommodate the various features which 'the life of prayer' exhibits" (CoP 3). Fundamental to this understanding is that philosophy does not provide a foundation for prayer; rather it leaves everything as it is and tries to give an account of it.

Accepting Wittgenstein's view that "philosophy leaves everything as it is" (PhI § 124) does not mean that all that religious people say must be accepted at face value; if a mistake or confusion occurs, it can be recognized by criteria found within religion. But, Philips asks, how does one distinguish the criteria from confusions? (CoP 8) Appealing to Wittgenstein again, he offers the answer: by paying attention to the grammar of what is said. Wittgenstein differentiates surface grammar from depth grammar. Surface grammar is that which immediately impresses itself upon us about the use of a word in the construction of a sentence. Depth grammar is made explicit by asking what can and cannot be said of the concept in question. Thus, it is a matter of becoming conceptually clear about the concepts at hand.

1.1 Externalism and Internalism

Becoming acquainted with a language is a matter of not simply mastering a vocabulary and rules of grammar, but of knowing how things bear on each other in the language in such a way as to make it possible to say certain things and see certain connections but not others. Phillips is often found quoting Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations,* § 19: "to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life." Phillips believes that the same could be said of religion. However, it is a misunderstanding to

speak of religion *as* a form of life. Instead, what Phillips says is that it is impossible to imagine a religion without imagining it *in* a form of life. In the philosophy of religion, under Wittgenstein's influence, this insistence has led to a polarizing of viewpoints. In "Belief, Change and Forms of Life: The Confusions of Externalism and Internalism" (1981), Phillips explores how this has come about.

Looking back to the literature of the fifties we find a certain kind of disagreement between philosophical believers and unbelievers that still endures to this day. Whereas the unbelievers suggest that the problematic core of religious beliefs is to be found, not in their falsity, but in their meaninglessness, the believers argue that beliefs are meaningful. Nonetheless, believers and unbelievers agree on the criteria of meaningfulness that has to be satisfied. Some philosophers, under Wittgenstein's influence, suggest that these disputes are irrelevant because they never raise the question of whether the criteria of meaningfulness should be agreed on in the first place. What happens is that criteria of meaning appropriate to certain aspects of human life and activity are made synonymous with meaning in general. Phillips states that a clear example in our culture has been the tendency to elevate scientific criteria and procedures as normative. On the contrary, we should inquire into the meanings which religious beliefs have in the forms of life of which they are a part. Moreover, instead of constructing theories of meaning, we should look at the use concepts actually have. Phillips sees this as the force of Wittgenstein's command, "Don't think. Look!" (PhI § 66 = BCFL 61). This position constitutes an attack on what Phillips calls *externalism*. The terminology that Phillips often associates with externalism include its habit to 'sublime the logic of language', its tendency to do

"philosophy by italics", and its appeal to realism and evidentialism. All of these terms now contribute to the contemporary meaning of foundationalism.

Following Wittgenstein's suggestions in the philosophy of religion seems to bring problems of its own. The questions emerge: "What if we agree that various aspects of human life and activity, religion included, have distinctive meanings which must not be reduced to a spurious unity?" and, "what if we also agree that philosophical confusions may be generated by the obscuring of these distinctive meanings?" (BCFL 61) To some philosophers the inevitable consequence is the dividing of human life into strict compartments, each autonomous regarding its meaning. Others say that religious belief is logically distinct from other kinds of belief, so that what is and what is not meaningful in this context is to be determined solely by whatever is called religious language. It then seems that religious belief is an absolute measure brought to bear on people's lives; a measure that cannot itself be influenced, developed, changed, or threatened by social or cultural events of any kind. It follows from this position that religious belief is made safe from all criticism and change. As such, future, past, or present could be no threat to it, as faith would be independent of temporal matters. At a great distance from trying to meet the criteria of meaning imposed in religious belief by externalism, this reaction simply declares that all external criteria of meaning are irrelevant to religious belief. Accordingly, Phillips names this reaction *internalism*, the cost of which comes at a high price. Phillips applies the remarks made by F. C. S. Schiller with respect to Kant's categorical imperative in ethics: "[...] it could not be convicted of failure to work, because it could never be required to work at all. Nay, it could glory in its uselessness,

and conceive it as the proof of its immaculate purity."[1] Religious belief begins to resemble formal games: internally consistent, but unconnected with the day-to-day lives of people. Terms often related to internalism include relativism, anti-realism, and lately, post-foundationalism.

It was not until 1981, with the publication of "Belief, Change and Forms of Life: The Confusions of Externalism and Internalism", that Phillips explicitly defined the two terms, externalism and internalism, although these viewpoints have been implicit in his previous writings and also explicit as a theme. He states that internalism and externalism are thought to be the only alternatives in which a philosopher must take his or her stance. Moreover, each alternative feeds off the deficiencies of the other. For example, because certain philosophers, including Phillips, attacked forms of externalism in the philosophy of religion, critics assumed that they must hold an internalist view. On the other hand, supporters of externalism embrace their position because they think it necessary if the dangers of internalism are to be avoided. In "Religious Belief and Language-Games" from his *Faith and Philosophical Enquiry* (1970), Phillips poses the problem as follows: "Many religious apologists feel that if religious beliefs are not to appear as esoteric games they must be shown to be important. [...] What remains problematic is the way in which the apologists think the importance of religion can be established." (FPE 80)

1.2 Externalism

Phillips first illustrated externalist inclinations in the philosophy of religion in *The Concept of Prayer* (1965). Here, the discussion centers around philosophy thought of as conceptual analysis - a view he feels characterizes contemporary philosophy of religion in the English-speaking world. Phillips identifies (p. 4) Michael Foster's *Mystery and*

[1] F. C. S. Schiller, *Problems of Belief* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1924), pp. 138-39 = BCFL 62.

Philosophy as such an example. Foster writes: "The goal towards which both scientist and philosopher are working is a state in which there will be no more mystery. The pursuit of this goal seems to be one of the deepest impulses of the new philosophy."[2] Foster misses the point entirely as he fails to differentiate between a conceptual *account* and a conceptual *analysis*. A conceptual account is merely descriptive and as a result leaves everything as it is, whereas a conceptual analysis tries to be normative and to some extent eliminates mystery. However, only once one tries to proceed with a conceptual analysis, specifically within religion, one immediately runs into difficulties. The trouble, Phillips states, is that most philosophers are not even aware of this as they import another language game to bear upon religion. Wittgenstein was the first to use the term 'language-game' as he came to realize that language is not so homogenous as to provide a single set of rules. Thus, in an attempt to preserve the heterogeneity of language he came up with the notion of 'language-games'.

Wittgenstein never defines what he means by a 'language-game'; instead the reader is thrown into the notion at the beginning of *Philosophical Investigations* in connection with children learning a language: "I shall also call the whole consisting of language and the actions into which it is woven, a 'language-game'" (PhI § 7). The actions into which language is woven are described as a 'form of life': "The term 'language-*game*' is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or a form of life" (PhI § 23). It follows that the form of life determines the rules of the language-game, how rigorous or flexible these rules are and how closely they approximate or depart from a calculus. The uses of language are various and they are interwoven with the various activities in which we are engaged.

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[2] London: S.C.M. Press, 1957, p. 20.

Wittgenstein's views has subsequently led to liberating epistemology from the narrow criteria of logical positivism. As Phillips remarks, the slogan "the meaning of a word is to be found in the way it is used" (CoP 4) has become well-known. However, religion seems to have benefited little from the supposed concessions. Philosophers emphasize that by 'use' they do not mean any kind of use, for it is the essence of language that it must make a difference whether one says one thing rather than another. According to some philosophers, many of the things religious believers say must be rejected as a misuse of language. The mistake, supposedly, lies in the fact that the way in which religious people use certain concepts breaks the rules that govern their use. These rules are determined by the way in which we ordinarily use words. Almost sarcastically Phillips states, "It has never been clear to me who the 'we' are, or what 'ordinary' refers to. One thing seems clear, 'we' excludes religious believers, and 'ordinary language' excludes much of what they say" (CoP 5). Phillips identifies Anthony Flew as making the point that since the meaning of religious statements concerning the existence or love of God are said by believers to be so different from the meaning of 'existence' and 'love' in non-religious contexts, they can "thus be killed by inches, the death by a thousand qualifications."[3] Moreover, Flew suggests that the believer's statements can be so eroded by qualification that they are no longer statements at all. With this view, the task of philosophy becomes that of pointing out, and, if possible, correcting the linguistic mistakes religious believers make.

Flew is not just one of the philosophers Phillips singles out as having a much different view of the relation of philosophy to religion from that implied by

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[3] A. G. N. Flew, "Theology and Falsification", *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, ed. A. Flew and A. MacIntyre (London: S.C.M. Press, 1955), p. 96 = CoP 5-6.

Wittgenstein's remarks. He also identifies Ronald Hepburn, C. B. Martin, and Peter Munz as philosophers who claim to detect a norm of meaningfulness that can put to test the validity of religious statements. The norm, of course, is 'ordinary language'. This view of religious concepts is based on the fundamental assumption that there is a primary context of 'ordinary' use which can self-evidently be taken as paradigmatic for evaluating use in other contexts. In reply to such an assumption, Phillips urges that one takes the advice which, according to W. H. Watson, expresses 'kernel of Wittgenstein': "...look to see what men do with things, with words, and with ideas, and observe their behaviour."[4]

The trouble with Flew is that he pays too much attention to the surface grammar of religious statements because he too easily assumes that words such as 'existence', 'love', 'will', are used in the same way of God as of human beings and of objects. Moreover, to understand the limits of what can be said about a concept, one must take into account the context in which the concept is used. Flew seems to say that people's conception of God must be judged by reference to something called 'ordinary language', the paradigm of rationality. Accordingly, the difference between talk about God and talk about physical objects is that the latter talk, unlike the former, corresponds to an objective reality. Phillips notes that this view of reality is based on a philosophical confusion that Peter Winch describes in his article "Understanding a Primitive Society": "Reality is not what gives language sense. What is real and what is unreal shows itself *in* the sense that language has."[5] The philosophers Phillips criticizes speak about what is real and what is unreal as if there were a check not found in the actual use of language, but transcending it. These philosophers, Phillips states, are guilty of arbitrary linguistic legislation: they

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[4] W. H. Watson, *On Understanding Physics* (Harper Torchbooks, 1959), p. xiv = CoP 7.
[5] Published in *The American Philosophical Quarterly* 1 (1964) 309 = CoP 9.

impose a meaning a word must have without specifying any context. They in fact impose an alien grammar upon religious faith. As a result the whole conception of religion standing in need of justification is confused, because philosophy can be neither for nor against religion: "it leaves everything as it is". Philosophy is different than apologetics in this way, since it is not the task of philosophy to decide whether there is a God or not, but to ask what it means to affirm or deny the existence of God.

Phillips is arguing for a reorientation of the relation of philosophy to religion: the criteria of meaningfulness concerning religious concepts are to be found within religion itself; failure to observe this leads to misunderstanding. For instance, Phillips deals with the concept of prayer. In doing so, it may seem that he is taking a lot for granted, and particularly the most important one of all: the existence of God. He writes, "The primary task of anyone setting out to study philosophy of religion, it is thought, is to discover whether or not God exists" (CoP 12). The following question emerges: How can one discuss prayer as talking to God, unless one has first resolved the question whether there is anyone to talk to? The request conceals a "world of presuppositions." Philosophers who request an empirical verification here assume they know the conceptual category to which the reality of God belongs. However, the primary question to be answered is, what kind of philosophical account does the concept of divine reality call for? For Phillips, in order to answer this question one must determine the depth grammar of the concept to be investigated. Talking about the existence of God differs drastically from discussing facts that can be empirically verified. Because religious believers want to say there is 'something' called God, it has been assumed that it should be possible to establish whether this 'something' exists in the way in which we establish the truth or falsity of

certain matters of fact when there is some uncertainty about them. However, what is the case is not established the same way in every context. As Phillips states, the notion of a fact is a complex one, but it seems that it always makes sense to say that what a fact is may not have been. And yet, most believers are not prepared to say that God might not exist: "The point is not that *as a matter of fact* God will always exist, but that it *makes no sense* to say that God might not exist" (CoP 14). The concept of God is such that the possibility of the non-existence of God is logically precluded. One of the most important conclusions from this argument is that philosophical assent to the *kind* of being God can be said to possess does not entail belief in God.

1.2.1 Religious Belief and Language-Games

In "Religious Belief and Language-Games", Phillips criticizes two influential externalist attempts to establish the importance of religious belief. First, an attempt to show that religious faith is more valuable than any alternative, 'value' being a relative term presupposing a common measure – this recalls Phillips' analysis of Flew in *The Concept of Prayer.* Second, an attempt to show that religious belief is rational, by employing a notion of rationality which transcends belief and nonbelief. This example is brought to fruition in Phillips's discussion of John Searle in "Searle on Language-Games" (1989- also in WR).

John Searle provides an example of a philosopher who has embraced the liberation of epistemology from the narrow criteria of logical positivism, and yet neglects to grant religion the supposed concessions. The slogan "the meaning of a word is to be found in the way it is used" (CoP 4) has become well known and Searle demonstrates this

eloquently in his "Background of Meaning", 1980.[6] In this article Searle explores the different meanings of the word 'cut' by using the examples 'He cut the grass' and 'He cut the cake' (p. 227). In the two contexts the action of cutting is understood differently. He states, "The reason that the same semantic content, 'cut', determines different sets of truth conditions [...] derives not from any ambiguity of a semantic kind, but rather from the fact that as members of our culture we bring to bear on the literal utterance and understanding of a sentence a whole background of information about how nature works and how our culture works" (pp. 226-27). Thus, in most cases the literal meaning of a sentence or expression only determines a set of truth conditions given a set of *background assumptions and practices*. Moreover, these assumptions that determine the interpretation of a sentence are not part of the semantic content of the sentence. Searle calls the set of assumptions and practices that make interpretation possible 'the background'. This proposal sounds very similar to Wittgenstein's notion of language-games.

In "Searle on Language-Games and Religion", Phillips begins by noting Searle's understanding of Wittgenstein's philosophy in his discussion with Bryan Magee, particularly Searle's brief comments on Wittgenstein's remarks on religious belief.[7] Searle's comments, Phillips notes, are characteristic of a frequent reaction to Wittgenstein's influence on the philosophy of religion and demonstrate what frequently happens when philosophers consider his remarks on religion: "In relation to religion, even more than elsewhere, many fail to appreciate how radical a challenge Wittgenstein

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[6] In J. R. Searle, Ferenc Kiefer & Manfred Bierwisch, eds. *Speech Act Theory and Pragmatics*. Dordrecht, Holland / Boston, U.S.A / London, England: D. Reidel Publ. Co., 1980, pp. 221-232.

[7] B, Magee, "Wittgenstein: Dialogue with John Searle", in *The Great Philosophers*. BBC Books, 1987. - All quotations from this volume.

makes to our philosophical assumptions" (WR 22). When Searle comments on Wittgenstein's remarks on religion, he contradicts what he says about Wittgenstein's conception of a language-game. It is helpful to quote Searle's critical comments on Wittgenstein's remarks on religion at length:

> Wittgenstein's aversion to theory and his insistence the philosophy should be purely descriptive and not critical leads him to a kind of waffling in certain crucial areas. Consider religious discourse for example. [...] I think most people who knew him would say that he was an atheist. Now in a way, when you read his remarks about God, you almost feel that he wants to have it both ways. He wants to talk about God and still be an atheist. He wants to insist that to understand religious discourse we need to see the role it plays in people's lives. And that is surely right. But of course, you would not understand the role that it plays in their lives unless you see that religious discourse refers beyond itself. To put it bluntly, when ordinary people pray it is because they think there is a God up there listening. But whether or not there is a God listening to their prayer isn't itself part of the language game. The reason people play the language game of religion is because they think there is something outside the language game that gives it a point. You have to be a very *recherché* sort of religious intellectual to keep praying if you don't think there is any real God outside the language who is listening to your prayers. (pp. 344-5 = WR 22-3)

The first problem with Searle's remarks is closely related to Wittgenstein's critique of realism in epistemology. According to realist theories, we first believe in the reality of states of affairs, and then, as a result, act in the characteristic ways that we do. Searle says: "The reason people play the language game of religion is because they think there is something outside the language game that gives it its point" (p. 345 = WR 23). In a footnote, Phillips states that he would not speak of 'the language game of religion'; rather he understands religious belief involving many language-games. This is similar to Phillips' insistence of speaking of religion existing *in* a form of life instead of *as* a form of life (see # 1.1 above), for the significance of religious belief could not be elucidated without exposing how it illuminates other features of human life. Searle's comment is open to an objection Wittgenstein makes against all realist theories. Phillips questions what 'believing' amounts to if the point of playing a language-game is given prior to

belief. 'Believing' is itself a language-game, and as such, Wittgenstein's objection is directed against a realist analysis of any kind of belief, and not simply a realist analysis of religious belief. By placing 'belief' outside all possible language-games, the realist places it beyond all possible techniques of application in which it could have any sense. The belief would then have to tell you what it is without any such context - a supposition Searle would find incoherent based on his "The Background of Meaning." As Phillips states, if the belief that the 'religious language-game' has a point is itself placed in an actual situation, it would be an instance of believing in God. This religious believing would have its meaning within the 'religious language-game' and could not be a reason outside the game for playing it.

Wittgenstein's methods invite us to engage in a common discussion of religious belief; yet, in the philosophy of religion, this is precisely what philosophers seldom do: they prefer to discuss philosophical concepts, instead of the religious beliefs that are important in people's lives. This brings us to the second problem of Searle's remarks. He says: "You have to be a very *recherché* sort of religious intellectual to keep praying if you don't think there is any real God outside the language who is listening to your prayers" (p. 345 = WR 29). But this, Phillips states, cannot be a remark against Wittgenstein's analyses, because everyone, including Wittgenstein, would say that it is pointless to pray to God unless there is a God to pray to. Rather, "*The conceptual disagreement is precisely over what saying that amounts to*" (WR 29). Moreover, Searle cannot say, as though it were an argument against Wittgenstein: "[...] when ordinary people pray it is because they think there is a God up there listening" (p. 345 = WR 29),

because it is exactly the grammar of such ordinary language that is being discussed. Searle seems to take this grammar for granted.

Grammar is often taken for granted when philosophers of religion indulge in what Phillips calls "*philosophy by italics.*" He states that in objecting to Wittgenstein's remarks on religion, philosophers are likely to say, 'After all, God *exists*'; 'God is *real*'; 'someone must listen to prayers' (WR 29). The problem is that these philosophers fail to realise that no grammatical work has been done by simply italicising these terms. Philosophy's humble task is the clarification of these concepts in their natural settings. Furthermore, such clarity is as essential for an understanding of atheism as it is for an understanding of religious belief.

1.2.2 Sublime Existence

In his paper, "Sublime Existence" (1990), Phillips explores the externalist tendency to sublime the logic of language. He first states that Anselm's ontological argument is not so much a proof of the existence of God; rather "Anselm wanted to understand what he *already* believed" (WR 10). In determining what kind of understanding Anselm achieves, Phillips appeals to Norman Malcolm who suggests Anselm achieved a grammatical or conceptual insight.[8] Thus, 'necessary existence' is part of the grammar of God. Phillips states, "Our talk and behaviour show that we recognize these differences when not philosophizing, but we ignore them when we philosophize" (WR 12). The reason he believes we do this is because of our tendency to what Wittgenstein calls sublime the logic of language, i.e. taking language out of its contexts of application. Phillips gives eight examples in how we do this: (1) the claim

[8] N. Malcolm, "Anselm's Ontological Arguments", in N. Malcolm, *Knowledge and Certainty.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963.

that it is not 'fitting' to speak of God's existence; (2) the claim that to speak of God's existence contradicts the logic of 'existence'; (3) the claim that we can ask, 'But is it really so?' independently of the criteria, in any context, for determining what is so; (4) the attempt to understand necessary propositions we are speculating hypothetically about and the nature of that necessity beyond the limits of our knowledge; (5) the capacity to recognize necessary propositions and contradictions explained best by the hypothesis that God has made us in such a way that we are able to do this; (6) the fact that talking of the necessity of divine love and judgement implies prior belief in the existence of a God of whom this love and judgment can be predicated; (7) the fact that if grammatical insights of Anselm's argument are recognized, atheism cannot take the form of saying, "There is no God"; and (8) the sublimation of religious affirmation according to which a recognition of Anselm's insights could lead to an acknowledgement that God exists independently of the context of religious belief. (WR 19)

It is enough to just analyse the second example in order to get a clear understanding of what Phillips means by the tendency to sublime the logic of language. Dealing with the claim that to speak of God's existence contradicts the logic of existence, he appeals to Kierkegaard's notion that God does not exist, but is eternal (CoUP 296 = WR 13), and to Simone Weil for whom anything that exists is unworthy of absolute, unconditional love. In saying this Simone Weil believes that religion is rescued from anthropomorphism and idolatry; from a god who is no more than man writ large, a natural god (GrG 99 = WR 13). The problem is that philosophers often take these expressions at face value and insist that an eternal God should not be said to exist. Granting the importance of these grammatical distinctions, Phillips asks why we should

"tidy up" ordinary language. Words such as 'exist' and 'belief that' are used in the same way as 'eternal' and 'belief in'; so why should we object to these words? The point here is "in the practice" (WR 13). Moreover, philosophers have to appreciate that to say, "There is a God", is not to say, "There is a God, but there might not have been one", and likewise to say, "There is no God", is not to say, "There is no God, but there might have been one". These ways of talking fail to do justice to atheism and belief as it sublimes the logic of 'existence' and 'belief'. Phillips clearly puts precedence to practice as a means to emphasize that philosophy should be contemplative rather than prescriptive. Thus, it is well time that philosophers grant the same concessions from logical positivism that epistemology and other areas of philosophy have enjoyed to religion as well. Nonetheless, Phillips is by no means shielding religious practices and beliefs from criticism, nor is he severing them from the daily aspects of human life.

1.3 Internalism

In the previous section only a few of Phillips' denials of external connections have been illustrated; yet, because of such denials, critics assume that he denies connections of *any* kind between religious belief and aspects of human life. The thinking goes: if the man cannot support externalism, he must support internalism! In "Belief, Change, and Forms of Life" (1981), Phillips identifies five theses that have been attributed to him:

1. Religious beliefs are logically cut off from all other aspects of human life.
2. Whatever is called religious belief determines what is and what is not meaningful in religion.
3. Religious beliefs cannot be criticized.
4. Religious beliefs cannot be affected by personal, social, or cultural events.
5. Religious belief can only be understood by religious believers. (BCFL 86)

By looking at textual evidence, it is clear that none of these apply to Phillips. As early as his *The Concept of Prayer* (1965), Phillips acknowledges that many Christian philosophers have thought that the attempt to give a philosophical account of religious activities threatens the autonomy of religion (CoP 3). Moreover, he states, the task of philosophy is not to settle the question whether a person is talking to God or not, but to ask what it means to affirm or deny that a person is talking to God. Nonetheless, religious concepts are not technical concepts: "They are not cut off from the common experiences of human life: joy and sorrow, hope and despair. Because this is so, an attempt can be made to clarify their meaning. The idea of prayer as talking to God presents us with this task." (CoP 40)

In "God and Ought" (1966 – also in FPE), Phillips disagrees with the account offered by some theologians that make religious language appear to be technical, cut off from the language spoken by everyone else in the community. This picture "cannot account even for religious phenomena, such as the traffic between unbelief and belief [...] Religious doctrines, worship, ritual, etc., would not have the importance they do were they not connected with the practices other than those which are specifically religious" (FPE 230). Phillips uses the example of a man who prays to God for forgiveness, stating that his prayer would be worthless if it was not a result of problems in his relationships with other people. Phillips states that these problems can be appreciated by both the religious and non-religious. Due to such connections between religious and non-religious activity, it is possible to communicate the meaning of religious language to someone unfamiliar with it, even "if all one achieves is to stop him from talking nonsense." (FPE 230)

By carefully considering eternal love or the love of God in "Faith, Scepticism and Religious Understanding" (1967 – also in FPE), Phillips tries to show what significance it has in human experience, the kind of circumstances that bring it about, and the kind of human dilemmas it answers. He writes, "I am anxious to show that religion is not some kind of technical discourse or esoteric pursuit cut off from the ordinary problems and perplexities, hopes and joys, which most of us experience at some time or other. If it were, it would not have the importance it does have for so many people." (FPE 21)

In "Religious Belief and Philosophical Enquiry" (1968 – also in FPE) Phillips states how religious believers make mistakes just like anyone else. If what they say comes under the appropriate criteria of meaningfulness, they must answer to these criteria. He notes that John Hick is right in saying that certain conceptions of God are confused, such as "'Yuri Gagarin's concept of God as an object that he would have observed, had it existed, during his first space flight.' It can be shown to be confused in two ways: first, by reference to what one can reasonably expect to observe in space, and secondly, by reference to what is meant by the reality of God." (FPE 72)

Lastly, another textual reference demonstrating that Phillips does not espouse any of the five internalist theses attributed to him is found in "Religious Belief and Language-Games" (1970). He states that it is important not to confuse the view he argues for with another that has superficial resemblances to it - namely the view put forward by T. H. McPherson: "Religion belongs to the sphere of the unsayable, so it is not to be wondered at that in theology there is much nonsense (i.e., many absurdities); this is the natural result of trying to put into words – and to discuss – various kinds of inexpressible

'experiences,' and trying to say things about God."[9] J. A. Passmore comments on this observation: "One difficulty with this line of reasoning, considered as a defence of religion, is that it 'saves' religion only at the cost of leaving the door open to any sort of transcendental metaphysics – and indeed to superstition and nonsense of the most arrant sort."[10] Phillips replies by imploring that religion must take the world seriously. He argues that religious reactions to various situations cannot be assessed according to some external criteria of adequacy. However, the connections between religious beliefs and such situations must not be fantastic since whether the connections are fantastic is decided by criteria that are not in dispute. Phillips uses the example of some religious believers who may try to say that all suffering has some purpose. He notes that when they speak like this, one can accuse them of not taking suffering seriously. Moreover, if religious believers talk of death as if it were a sleep of a long duration, one may accuse them of not taking death seriously. These religious responses are fanciful because they ignore or distort what we already know. Phillips writes, "When what is said by religious believers does isolate the facts or distort our apprehension of situations, no appeal to the fact that what is said is said in the name of religion can justify or excuse the violation or distortion." (WR 70)

1.3.1 Advice to Philosophers Who Are Christians

In 1988 Phillips was invited to present a paper at the Cardinal Mercier Lectures at the University of Leuven (Belgium). He presented "Advice to Philosophers who are Christians" (also in WR) in which he criticizes Alvin Plantinga's "Advice to Christian

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[9] T. H. McPherson, "Religion as the Inexpressible", in A. Flew & A. MacIntyre, eds., *New Essays in Philosophical Theology* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1955), p. 142 = WR 66.
[10] J. A. Passmore, "Christianity and Positivism": *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* (1957) 128 = WR 66.

Philosophers."[11] According to Plantinga, "we who are Christians and propose to be philosophers must not rest content with being philosophers who happen, incidentally, to be Christians; we must strive to be Christian philosophers" (p. 271 = WR 220). He gives advice on the character such striving should have that Phillips not only finds bad for philosophy, but bad for Christianity as well. Phillips concentrates on the philosophical aspects of this bad advice wherein he is critical of two things in particular: first, Plantinga's appeal to considerations outside of philosophy distorts the spirit of philosophical enquiry; second, Plantinga's conception of philosophical enquiry itself.

In his discussion of Plantinga's appeal to external considerations, Phillips quotes Plantinga claiming that "Christianity, these days, and in our part of the world, is on the move [...] There is also powerful evidence for this contention in philosophy" (p. 253 = WR 220). Phillips questions how this is supposed to be established on the basis of the state of philosophy in the fifties in relation to Christianity: "The public temper of main-line establishment philosophy in the English speaking world was deeply non-Christian. Few establishment philosophers were Christian: even fewer were willing to admit in public they were, and still fewer thought of their being Christian as making a real difference to their practice as philosophers" (p. 253 = WR 220). These three characterisations of the fifties are very different from each other, yet the third characterisation is particularly troublesome.

In attempting to show that Christianity is on the move, the third consideration Plantinga appeals to is the fact that now, unlike the fifties, Christians think that being a Christian makes a real difference to the way in which they practice philosophy. Now, Christians have a Christian philosophy. However, because Plantinga does not offer a

[11] Published in *Faith and Philosophy* 1/3 (1984). - All quotations from Plantinga are from this paper.

philosophical reason of why this might be so, "the new practice may be just as much a matter of fashion as the old practice; just as much the result of pressure, pressure, for example, from the Society for Christian Philosophers" (WR 222). Plantinga tells us, "Christian philosophers are philosophers of the Christian community and it is part of their task as *Christian* philosophers to serve the Christian community. But the Christian community has its own questions, its own concerns, its own topics for investigation, its own agenda and its own research programme" (p. 255 = WR 225). Phillips states that there are wider issues involved in these remarks, but as far as Plantinga expounds, one fashion has been exchanged for another. Plantinga does not demonstrate a serious commitment to philosophy as he wants the Christian philosopher to display autonomy, integrity, and boldness. Yet heeding Plantinga's advice thus far would not lead to any of these virtues. Instead, Phillips states, one follower of fashion in Princeton or Berkeley has simply been replaced by another follower of fashion in Grand Rapids or Arkadelphia, Arkansas. The spirit of philosophical enquiry has yet to emerge and by following Plantinga's advice so far, it never will.

Plantinga believes that there is such a thing as Christian philosophy, and such a thing as non-theistic philosophy. He says that the Christian philosopher can very well think of "topics of current concern in the broader philosophical world [...]in a different way" (p. 256 = WR 225). According to Phillips, the reason why Plantinga thinks like this can be found by noting the conception of philosophy Plantinga wants to reject. However, having rejected it, Plantinga thinks that his conception of philosophy is the only alternative. Phillips shows that this assumption is mistaken.

Plantinga is rightly opposed to a conception of philosopher as the arbiter of either the truth or the rationality of religious belief. He writes, "What I want to urge is that the Christian philosophical community ought not to think of itself as engaged in this common effort to determine the probability or philosophical plausibility of belief in God" (pp. 260-61 = WR 225). Phillips states that it has indeed been the shame of the philosophy of religion that it has been assumed, for so long, that externalism and foundationalism are the appropriate philosophical modes of discussing religious beliefs. However, these conclusions are arrived at by reflecting on the nature of religious belief, and they do not lead to Plantinga's conception of Christian philosophy. When Plantinga says, "the modern Christian *philosopher* has a perfect right, as a philosopher, to start from his belief in God. He has a right to assume it, take it for granted, in his philosophical work" (p. 264 = WR 229), what he means is that nobody can produce a general criterion of gauging whether a basic truth-claim shows that there is nothing questionable in the belief in God as basic in the Christian's perspective. Plantinga subsequently has to admit that he too possesses no general criterion by which the unbeliever could be shown why belief in God should be basic. As Phillips states, believer and non-believer cannot stop each other from committing themselves to the fundamental beliefs of their perspectives. That seems to be how far Plantinga's philosophy takes us. It follows from these conclusions that Christian and non-Christian modes of thought cannot be the subject of a common mode of philosophical enquiry.

Phillips states that if a person is confused about the sense in which belief in God is basic, the person can only be freed from confusion by being brought to see what led into such confusion in the first place. Just being told that no general criterion of

basicality has been found which prevents the Christian saying that belief in God is basic, will not be much help. The cause of puzzlement is the kind of basicality the belief in God has, or what believing in God amounts to. Here, Phillips notes, a non-confused non-Christian may be of greater help than a philosophically confused Christian. Coming to see what belief in God means is a matter of exposing its grammar and clearing away the tendencies of thought that stand in the way of the clarity desired. (WR 231)

In elucidating the surroundings of belief in God, the philosopher is not doing something called Christian philosophy, any more than he is doing non-Christian philosophy in elucidating the surroundings that maintain certain forms of atheism. The philosopher, then, is simply doing philosophy and certainly not embracing a religious or atheistic perspective. The concern is the conceptual character, not truth. As Phillips states, clarity about the conceptual character brings one to see why philosophy cannot determine truth in such matters. The philosopher will, of course, be interested in what it means to speak of truth in such contexts; but that interest is in itself not a desire to embrace those truths.

Plantinga holds that fundamental Christian beliefs are not answerable to philosophical justification. Phillips agrees, but comes to this conclusion as a result of philosophical reflection, not as an assumption he begins with. It is important to note that this does not commit him to the view that no religious belief can be confused. Moreover, this does not mean that religious beliefs are ultimately based on philosophical justifications after all, because the philosophical procedures referred to are those that seek to clarify the grammar of religious concepts themselves. But, Phillips states, there is a risk involved in philosophical enquiry, for its conclusions cannot be guaranteed in

advance, and one may not arrive at them. Nevertheless, one who is genuinely philosophically puzzled has no choice, and must go where the argument leads. With Plantinga, things seem to be different: for him, although the "Christian philosopher does indeed have a responsibility to the philosophical world at large, [...] his fundamental responsibility is to the Christian community, and finally to God" (p. 262 = WR 235). Philips contrasts this with Wittgenstein's remark: "The philosopher is not a citizen of any community of ideas; that's what makes him a philosopher."[12]

1.3.2 Belief, Change, and Forms of Life

In *Types of Christian Theology*[13] Hans Frei identifies five types of Christian Theology. Phillips and other "Wittgensteinian fideists" are included in type 5, referring to theology as pure Christian self-description with absolutely no interaction with philosophy at all. Christian theology is simply the grammar of faith, an internal procedure with no connections beyond itself. All theologians can do is repeat what the Bible says, without any attempt at conceptual redescription. Knowing how to use the biblical phrases is all that is involved in understanding them. Thus philosophy is wholly external to theology. (pp. 48-49)

According to Frei, the type 5 theologians apparently make the mistake of regarding religious concepts as 'verbal skills'. For them, understanding religious concepts is simply a matter of acquiring and exercising the skill to use them in suitable ways. The characteristic mistake of the type 5 theologians is trying to explain religious

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[12] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967 § 455 = WR 235. – In his careful analysis of Plantinga's thought *Experientialist Epistemology: Plantinga and Alston on Christian Knowledge* (Ph. D. dissertation, McGill University, 2001, xxii + 480p. – eqv. double-spaced), Timothy L. Dyck does not make reference to the criticism of Plantinga made by Phillips and referred to in this section on "Advice to Philosophers Who Are Christians".

[13] New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992.

concepts without referring "to any conceptual scheme of an abstract or general kind but only to the way they are acquired and practiced in this specific linguistic community." Moreover, "Communal Christian self-description is a matter of being able to use words like faith, hope, and love in the context of the Christian community - beyond it, too, of course, but on the basis of how you learned it there in worship and in the formation of Christian identity" (p. 92). Frei regards this type 5 as symptomatic of a deeply misguided conception of theology.

The term 'Wittgensteinian fideism' cannot be attributed to Phillips. In fact, when Kai Nielsen first introduced the term in 1967[14], his name is not on the list, although *The Concept of Prayer* had been out since 1965. By 1970 Phillips was expressing doubts about all talk of religious beliefs as distinctive language-games, because this tended to make them esoteric and immune to criticism from outside. In "Religious Beliefs and Language-Games" (1970), he acknowledges: "I write this chapter as one who has talked of religious beliefs as distinctive language-games, but also as one who has come to feel misgivings in some respects about doing so" (WR 56). These misgivings were lost on Schubert M. Ogden who in his "Linguistic Analysis and Theology" (1977) writes about Phillips' position that it "is as pure a form of fideism as one is likely to find."[15]

In material presented in lectures held in 1979 published as "Belief, Change, and Forms of Life: The Confusion of Externalism and Internalism" (1981), and later reworked in *Belief, Change and Forms of Life* (1986), Phillips shows from his own writings that he has long argued against the very theses attributed to him and others. Frei refuses to take seriously the claim that Phillips has always held that he is a philosopher

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[14] K. Nielsen, "Wittgensteinian Fideism": *Philosophy* 42 (July 1967 – No. 161) 191-209.
[15] Published in *Theologische Zeitschrift* 33/5 (Sept./ Oct. 1977) 324.

and not a theologian. Much of Phillips' work did expose the shortcomings of externalism, and this gave rise to the idea that he wants to safeguard specifically Christian doctrine from the impact of non-religious criteria, i.e. in a rather internalist way. Yet, Phillips resolutely opposes also what he has called internalism; Frei does not notice it in his description of type 5 of Christian theology. It is interesting to note that Phillips suggests in lectures in 1979 that those who want examples of such internalism should look to theology rather than the philosophy of religion. For him, the early Karl Barth came close to this position, precisely because he was "reacting against the kind of externalism found in certain forms of liberalism where what was distinctively Christian seemed to be sacrificed to the prevailing intellectual theories of the day."[16]

There is really no justification for Frei's charge that Phillips leaves us, "when one cannot simply and uncritically parrot biblical and traditional formulae", with "a theology of total silence."[17] It is grossly unfair to say that, "when we ask about any kind of overlap with other modes of discourse that would help us both to render and make accessible a responsible redescription of biblical and traditional beliefs," we find that Phillips has "simply dematerialized" (p.55). Phillips has always maintained that fundamental beliefs and practices in religion are held fast by all that surrounds them. In his very first book, *The Concept of Prayer*, he insists that religious concepts are not "cut off from the common experiences of human life: joy and sorrow, hope and despair." (CoP 40)

In *Faith after Foundationalism* (1988), Phillips includes material from lectures given at Yale Divinity School a few years earlier. Though he does not mention Hans

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[16] D. Z. Phillips, *Belief, Change and Forms of Life* (New York: Macmillan, 1986), p. 82.
[17] H. Frei, *Types of Christian* Theology, p. 55.

Frei, in his discussion of George Lindbeck's *The Nature of Doctrine* (1984),[18] Phillips not only demonstrates once again how illusory a theologian's expectations of philosophy can sometimes be, he also concludes by echoing Lindbeck's concern that theologians should renew "the ancient practice of absorbing the universe into the biblical world" (FaFo 222); this seems close to Frei's own conception of theological work. Phillips also compares Barth's "protests against the alien paradigms of rationality to which religious belief was subjected or which it was all too ready to appropriate" with what he has learned from Wittgenstein (FaFo 226). Endorsing Emil Brunner's objection to Barth on the subject of natural theology, Phillips argues that "even if Barth wants to insist on God's revelation as something new, that revelation must illuminate what was in the person's life prior to the revelation" (FaFo 111). There have to be "points of contact", and they are not "arbitrary". Rather, the contexts in which we need to look for hints in exploring the meaning of specifically Christian beliefs and practices do include "conscience, nature, birth, death, relations between men and women" (FaFo 112). Frei's typology assumes that theologians first have to come to terms with some metaphysical system, either by submission, rejection or critical accommodation. However, Christian theology primarily interacts with *life* and not with some world-view or conceptual system.[19]

The term "Wittgensteinian fideism" is still a term carelessly thrown around today in an attempt to easily overlook Phillips and Wittgenstein's contributions to the

[18] Philadelphia, NY: Westminster Press.
[19] Fergus Kerr, "Frei's Types": *New Blackfriars* 75 (April 1994 – 881) 191-93.

philosophy of religion.[20] But as Phillips says, it is hard to keep a good label down, though he has also called it "simply a scandal in scholarship." (OnW 150)

[20] See C. Stephen Evans, *Faith Beyond Reason* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998, pp. 24-33.

Chapter Two

Contemporary Confusions: Faith after Foundationalism

Since Phillips' *Faith after Foundationalism* (1988) the terms 'externalism' and 'internalism' have somewhat subsided and been replaced by the 'modern' jargon of foundationalism and post-foundationalism respectively. This does not mean that the two sets of terms are identical; the focus seems to have changed somewhat and more concessions have been made in favour of internalism/post-foundationalism perspectives (see # 1.3.2). Through it all, however, Phillips has maintained his stance on the philosophical task.

2.1 Religion, Philosophy, and the Academy

In William Wainwright's collection, *God, Philosophy and the Academic Culture* (1996),[1] the participants discuss a perceived distance between philosophers of religion who adhere to the American Philosophical Association (APA) and the philosophers of religion who adhere to the American Academy of Religion (AAR). Some of the APA group have been known to think they are better philosophers than their AAR colleagues, that their technical argumentation is more complex, and that rather than make an effort to understand these technicalities, AAR philosophers prefer "to indulge in the exotic, but logically loose ways of Continental thought" (RePA 129). Of course these philosophical opinions cannot be justified, though the remarks are morally and religiously unfortunate, because they seem to be an intellectually arrogant form of, 'Lord, we thank thee that we are not as other philosophers are'. As a result, Phillips states, "this scene is best forgotten" (RePA 129). However, the discussions between the APA and AAR groups

[1] Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press.

also mention political, historical, and sociological reasons for their differences. Although the reasons themselves are not philosophical, Phillips shows that philosophical questions grow out of them.

The political liberalism of the democratic constitution of the USA enables its citizens public discourse as equal members participating within a common conception of reason and experience. As such, there is no room for sectarian views. Regarding the relation to religion in the Academy, this means that it can be discussed, but not espoused in the name of intellectual enquiry. Religious commitments can be voiced in private religious academic institutions, but in order to enjoy the same academic status as secular commitments, they tend to conform to the same liberal, democratic ethos. As Phillips notes, it takes a brave voice to question the assumptions on which a common public discourse and its conception of a common reason and experience are said to depend. Philosophers of religion in the APA are said to be unhappy about this general situation, while their AAR colleagues are said to be happy to work within it. One reason offered by APA philosophers is that, unlike the AAR philosophers, they have a "robust conception of truth." Philip Quinn says that "analytic philosophers believe that truth and falsity can be determined in a principled fashion" (RePA 130). Phillips questions whether "in a principled fashion" means "philosophically"; if this is not the case, how would "having a robust conception of truth" indicate any *philosophical* difference between the two groups?

In a practical sense, analytic philosophy is not specifically related to determinations of truth and falsity. "Philosophy", Phillips states, "is not a more sophisticated practical understanding of the fact that there is a chair in the room" (RePA

131). However, philosophy is concerned with the *concepts* of truth and falsity. Thus philosophical discussions are *conceptual* discussions in which it is natural to speak of philosophy investigating more *the reality* than *the existence* of physical objects. We cannot investigate that reality in the ways we investigate whether a particular physical object exists, since when that very discourse is called into question, we are raising the issue of whether it makes sense to speak in this way. In such a manner, scepticism, at its deepest, questions the very possibility of discourse. Plato, for example, came to see that no matter how general, the difference between philosophical enquiry and empirical enquiry is not a difference in degree, but a difference in kind. Yet among analytic philosophers of religion, there is a tendency to treat philosophical investigation as though it were a very general form of empirical investigation.

Phillips suspects that most analytic philosophers of religion would say that although there are different ways of determining the truth of propositions, this in no way affects the notions of truth and factuality involved. What this ignores is that the contexts in which these matters have their life are internally related to what factuality and truth come to. As a result analytic philosophers often sublime a conception of logic in a futile attempt to transcend all the grammatically varied concepts of our discourse, and thus, "the luminous philosophical insight" turns out to be an extremely simple-minded notion of factuality, of how "things are", almost as though one could point and say, "These are facts" (RePA 132). The surface grammar of our utterances may tempt us in this direction.

According to Phillips, many analytic philosophers of religion refer to the history of twentieth-century philosophy of religion as though logical positivism was dominant in

mid-century, whereas the most dramatic philosophical change was rather between logical positivism and the resurrection of the subject from its assumed death as the result of a thousand qualifications and charges of meaninglessness. However, this account is historically inaccurate due to the "curious neglect" of Wittgenstein, not only in the philosophizings of philosophers who call themselves "analytic", but in the account they give of the subject (RePA 132-3). Phillips insists that "even the most cursory reading of [Wittgenstein's] work should show how devastating a critique of positivism it contains and of its ambitions to give an account of 'pure seeing' in physicalist terms" (RePA 133). The fatal assumption of analytic philosophy of religion is that clarity entails cut-and-dried criteria by which judgements concerning truth and falsity are made. Wittgenstein, however, insists that *clarity involves the recognition of indeterminateness*. This is not to suggest, as some analytic philosophers may, settling for fuzzy concepts where clearer ones would be an advantage. If "Jesus is the Son of God" was on the same grammatical level as "Jesus is an apprentice carpenter" it would not have the importance it has. Phillips drives the point home stating: "To tell Jesus what others think of him, Peter simply has to make a *statement*. To tell Jesus what he thinks of him, Peter has to make a *confession*" (RePA 133). It is fruitless to say that the surroundings are unimportant unless a believer *first* believed that Jesus is the Son of God, because it is these very surroundings that show, in the first place, what "belief" amounts to in this context. Because they are not paying attention to these surroundings, the "tough" analyses of analytic philosophers are actually not tough enough.

Phillips questions how religious belief becomes severed from its sense when it is stripped of the surroundings it has. The answer, he believes, lies in seeing how this can

happen, philosophically, to the notion of belief more generally. Analytic philosophers of religion often speak of belief as a mental occurrence or disposition; to discover belief, to understand it, would then be to pay attention to a mental phenomenon. Wittgenstein questions this misleading picture: "How did we ever come to use such an expression as 'I believe...'? Did we at some time become aware of a phenomenon (of belief)? Did we observe ourselves and other people and so discover belief?" (PhI IIx, 190e = RePA 134)

As Phillips states, 'To get inside a person', to see 'what his beliefs come to', is not a matter of examining mental occurrence, or the functioning of cognitive faculties (the old empiricist assumption), but to see what they are in one's life. This remains the same from the simplest to the most complex cases. Phillips warns that if the picture of belief and thinking as a mental phenomenon of this kind continue, then, as Wittgenstein says: "If God had looked into our minds he would not have been able to see there whom we were speaking of" (PhI IIxi, 217e = RePA 135). It is interesting to note that Wittgenstein is attacking not only the intellectualist distortion of "belief", but the equally intellectualist distortion of "God looking into our minds": both are removed from their natural contexts by the misleading philosophical analysis.

Phillips is not only critical of certain modes of argumentation of the APA philosophers of religion, but of the philosophical perspectives often associated with the AAR philosophers as well. According to Phillips, these philosophers pride themselves on having learned the lessons of Kant's attack on metaphysics, and accuse their APA colleagues of being pre-Kantian.

Kant showed the futility of seeking knowledge outside human consciousness. That consciousness is characterised by categories within which, of necessity, we arrive at

the things we know. Therefore, Kant maintains that there is a dualism between the categories of human consciousness and how things really are. The former is the world of appearance to which we are confined, whereas the latter is ontologically beyond our grasp. According to the AAR philosophers we possess an *interpretation* of reality. Nicholas Wolterstorff describes the situation as follows:

> Reality is never anywhere present in us – not even in our present mental reality. In experience, representation is all, in inner sense as well as outer. But not representation as the pre-Kantians understood it, as *images*; but representation as Kant understood it, as always-ready-conceptualized experience-stuff – for which a better model than reflective images is representational paintings. To peel away the interpretation from the interpreted experience would not be to get at the pure given but lose the only given we have – the interpreted given. Prisoners, all of us, within the house of interpretation.[2]

According to APA philosophers the inevitable result is relativism, by which they seem to mean that "things are as they are" only within a conceptual scheme. Wolterstorff objects to this view of relativism, instead calling it *interpretation-universalism*.

From the overall situation, it seems that there is no independent check on any interpretation since we are not in a position to say whether an interpretation is correct or not. As a result, AAR philosophers suggest that the only intellectual option is tolerance for all interpretations. There is, thus, an internal link between interpretation-universalism and relativism.

Remembering Wittgenstein's insights, the AAR position is simply the flip side of the same metaphysical coin of the APA analytic philosophers of religion. As Phillips states, "the AAR philosophers speak of everything as interpretation because they think that if one is to speak of reality, it ought to be the unmediated concept of reality the emptiness of which is exposed by Wittgenstein. The APA philosophers think, rightly,

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[2] Ibid. p. 18 = RePA 137.

that to speak of everything as interpretation is to leave the door wide open to scepticism." (RePA 138)

The APA philosophers do not realize that their critique of classical foundationalism leaves them no better off. Evidentialists and Reformed epistemologists, those who argue that disputes between believers and unbelievers can be settled by an appeal to common evidence, admit that all that they can conclude is that the probabilities are on the side of belief. Whether they replace "conceptual schemes" with *ungrounded perspectival particularism* (Wolterstorff's choice), *noetic structures* (Plantinga's choice) or *doxastic practices* (Alston's choice), they all admit that there is a real possibility that "things as they are" may be quite different from what these perspectives, structures, or practices suggest. We may believe that they tell us how things are, but we can never know that because there is no way of deciding the issue between competing perspectives. This argument thinks we must be content with beliefs because, just as those who say we must be content with interpretations, certainty is thought to depend on something unavailable to us, a grounded conception of reality.

In contrast, in seeking clarity about the role concepts play in our lives, Wittgenstein directs our attention to what we actually do, to our perceptions of physical objects including their changes of aspect, to our experiences of sensations and emotions, to the ways in which we calculate and make moral and political judgements, to the ways we pray, and so forth. These are not conceptual schemes, perspectives, structures, or interpretations, all involving a metaphysical dualism about "how we think" and "the ways things are". Rather, they are *contexts* in which various distinctions between the real and the unreal have their life. Wittgenstein endeavours to give lucid representations of these

contexts by clearing up the grammar of the concepts involved. In *Faith after Foundationalism*, Phillips states:

> In stressing the naturalness of our world-picture Wittgenstein is not establishing it as the *right* one. But in saying this Wittgenstein is not embracing a form of relativity. He is not saying that every person has a right or that every group has a right to his or their world-picture as the right one...In noting changes in ways of thinking which may occur or have occurred, Wittgenstein is not testing hypotheses about the structure of the world. Rather, he is bringing out what is involved in these ways of thinking. He is not testing their foundations for they have no foundations. (FaF 63)

Wittgenstein calls for realism without empiricism, in which, at certain points, we are not talking about interpretations at all. As Phillips says, sometimes we are not interpreting something as seeing a tree, but we *see* a tree; we are not interpreting something *as* pain, but *have* a pain.

Phillips shifts the attention to praying. Are we in touch with the divine or not? Here, he notes, there are differences. In certain areas of life, the agreement which shows itself in the ways we act means that those who do not share that agreement are cut off from that form of human life. There are other matters, moral, political, aesthetic and religious where agreement, typically, does not share a common form, and where those cut off from some of these agreements in judgement are participants in others. Within the truth concerned in such matters, its grammar is not the same as truth in mathematics or the truth of a hypothesis in physics. In moral, political, aesthetic and religious contexts, "coming to truth" is a different matter, for a person must come to truth for himself or herself. The search for truth is carried on within certain broad parameters and there is a wide variety within them. In religion, "the coming to truth" is a matter of confession, a spiritual arrival. Thus, we cannot say, "This is the truth", without that being a confession; or, at least, if we did, it is called hypocrisy or a sin.

Once this is realised, we can see why philosophy itself cannot determine matters of truth and falsity in these contexts. According to Phillips, to think otherwise is itself to corrupt the notions of truth involved. Regarding philosophical doctrines, Wittgenstein's investigations are far reaching. Contrary to Wolterstorff, Wittgenstein would not be content to say that physicalists have their own assumptions which they are rational in holding. Rather, physicalism, like dualism, is subjected to a logical critique. It is different with religious belief: to speak of falsehood is to make a *religious* judgment. Phillips states that in a religious context, philosophical respect is shown by not distorting the notion of truth involved, and by being clear about what philosophy can and cannot do. He recalls Kierkegaard who argued that the distinctive contribution made by philosophy to "the monstrous illusion" in the Denmark of his day, was precisely to turn religious belief into a philosophical thesis.

When Wittgenstein comments on the different language-games we play, he is not indulging in anything like evidentialism; rather, he is contemplating, conceptually, the grammatical differences between these games, including grammatical differences in the notion of truth. Phillips uses the example of Jesus, who does not say, "It is true that I am the way and the life", but, "I am the way, the truth and the life". This affects, as Kierkegaard shows in *Philosophical Fragments* (1985), the difference between following Socrates and following Christ.

In giving perspicuous representations of situations, philosophy simultaneously shows how it cannot resolve them. Its task is to bring out what "resolution", "lack of resolution", etc, come to in these contexts. Phillips states that the AAR philosophers are

often right in assuming some of their APA counterparts; evidentialists in particular want to impose an artificial unity on this hubbub of voices.

There has been a long-standing engagement in the Wittgenstein tradition with the methodological assumptions of the social sciences and the claims to provide reductionist analysis of religious belief. Contrary to philosophers in the APA group, they have not said that these analyses have viewpoints common with their own presuppositions, but they criticise the assumptions of the APA group. This clears the ground to enable distinguishing genuine conflict from what philosophy often makes of it. Phillips states that the only way this is to be shown is through discussion. In his experience, Phillips believes that analytic philosophers have shown impatience with this. He draws the example of a person who said to him, "If you say I am confused and I deny it, how is that matter to be settled? We might as well go home" (RePA 143). Others think it can be settled by sociological survey of what people think religious belief is. But philosophy cannot be done in that way, for what people say will itself be an attempt at philosophising. Phillips appeals to Socrates who said that in philosophical discussion, only one opinion is being sought: that of the person addressed.

The obstacles in philosophical discussions are many, not least the fact that often trouble comes not from the fact that we confuse the logic of our language, but that certain forms of language may mean nothing to us. In the philosophy of religion, Phillips warns that we may have to face the fact that our disagreements are not about the conceptual character of a religion we agree on, but come, partly, from the fact that what religion means to us differs widely, that the hopes and expectations we entertain in the name of religion may be radically diverse.

Nonetheless, Phillips maintains that there is no alternative to discussion in an attempt to become clear about *that* fact. Just as Kierkegaard said that religion cannot conquer by force, according to Phillips, neither can philosophy.

2.2 Philosophy and Theological Castles

Phillips' contribution to *Contemporary Conceptions of God: Interdisciplinary Essays*, is titled "Philosophy and Theological Castles" (2003).[3] He offers a parable of castle building, in which he is indebted to Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard who both made use of the symbolism of castles-built-upon-the-air in their work. Philips uses the parable as a means to illustrate his position regarding the contemporary debate of post-foundationalism. Over the years the debate has shifted, in part due to Phillips' work, from externalist and internalist / foundationalist and post-foundationalist cross-fire, to debate within the internalist/post-foundationalist camps. Of course, this is not said to neglect the Reformed epistemologists, such as Plantinga, who still lay claim to a foundationalism, albeit through falsification. Though the semantical content has changed throughout the years, Phillips has been steadfast to his position: that of the outsider – the only way, after all, a philosopher should be. In his parable, Phillips captures the current theological climate well.

2.2.1 The Parable of the Castles

There was once a group of castle-builders whom each member made the identical claim:

> I am not showing you a castle I built. That would be too haughty of a claim. Instead, I am showing you *the* castle, the only one there is. It could not be otherwise, because this is the castle we live and have our being in. (PTC 161)

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[3] PTC in *Contemporary Conceptions of God*, [Studies in Religion and Society, 59], ed. Cyril G. Williams, (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2003), pp. 161-75.

Each member of the group describes a different castle. Yet, what do they say of the other members of the group? Again, each member responds identically:

> They are not describing the real castle. They are merely castle-*builders*; their castles are the product of their own imagination. There have always been such castle-builders and it has to be admitted that some of them have devised beautiful castles. But, in all the cases, the trouble is that they are not describing the real castle. (PTC 161)

Among the castle-builders, the following judgment is familiar: "You may *think* you are describing *the* castle but you are not. Your castle is of your own making." What is claimed about *the* castle varies: some say that the castle we live in is an eternal one in the heavens, made by God. Others say that the castle is constructed by the architectural principles of reason, while others say that if we want to understand the castle, we should begin from our own experiences. Some even say that the castle has evolved over time, with extra wings and extensions being built in reaction to aspects of the building that already exists. There are differences among this reaction over whether it could ever be said that the castle is complete.

A newcomer comes to visit these castle-builders, claiming that he has something important to tell them. He is not claiming to describe *the* castle, and nothing about him suggests that he is even trying to build a castle. The castle-builders then believe that he does not have the ability, or even the desire, to describe the castle we live in, and will surely soon go away.

However, the castle-builders are greatly surprised. They had forgotten that the newcomer has something important to tell them: he tells them there is no castle. He says:

> Look at the place in which we live, the different buildings; the different activities that go on in each; the complex road-system; the different ways in which roads intersect each other and lead to different neighbourhoods, some more mixed than others. Why do you think all this can be simplified, as though it all takes place within the walls of a castle? I tell you, there is no castle. (PTC 162)

from them. Second, the critic is not free of the tendencies to build castles; he once tried to build a castle himself. These tendencies keep returning, tempting him in new forms. In *Philosophical Investigations,* the voices Wittgenstein wrestles with are voices in himself.

Still, the newcomer wants castle-builders to see that they are confused, but the suggestion is likely to be resisted. The questions emerge: "How is self-recognition to be achieved? How do you get a castle-builder to say, 'I was confused when I tried to build a castle'?" (PTC 168) Regarding confusion, it is evident that self-recognition can only be achieved by a castle-builder if that builder comes to see the confused routes that led to the construction of the castle. If this does not happen, then the reaction to an accusation of confusion is likely to remain: "You aren't going to drive me out of my castle." To which Wittgenstein would reply: "I wouldn't dream of driving anyone out of his castle. I get him to see that it is not a castle, and then he will walk out of his own accord" (PTC 169). That is the only way that castles are surrendered by their builders. It is discovered that the castle foundations are aspects of ordinary life that have been sublimed to a status they cannot maintain. The difficulty lies in showing what it is about those aspects that lead one to think that they are the foundations of a metaphysical system. When that confusion is revealed, one comes home again to a new sensitivity about the variety of human existence. As Wittgenstein said, our task is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their ordinary use. (PhI § 116 = PTC 169)

As a result, the road home is always by an indirect route, by the patient unravelling of the confusions that led to the building of metaphysical castles. We now see that it is not so-called foundations that give sense to our lives, but our lives that give

The castle-builders react angrily to the newcomer, as some say that his denial is sufficient reason to have nothing to do with him. The newcomer's denial is seen as an obvious sign of a lack of seriousness. The impression is reinforced when the news emerges that the newcomer had once tried to build a castle, telling the totality of the facts that existed within, but not outside, its walls.

A shouting match erupts. The newcomer responds angrily and says, "There is no castle", while the castle-builders respond, "There certainly is". There is a suggestion in some parts that this shouting is a waste of time and a mutual accommodation should be vied for. It is pointed out that everyone argues from particular presuppositions, which should be evident to the castle-builders; how else could they account for the many versions of the castle? Because there is no way of demonstrating which presuppositions one should adopt, everyone can claim the right to argue from a certain set of presuppositions. Thus, one cannot show others that they have the wrong presupposition; but they have, accordingly they have to accommodate each other's castles.

Among those who settled for this accommodation, the shouting stopped, but for others observing it, life seemed lacklustre. True, everyone can speak about one's own castle, as though they come from ghettos rather than from castles. Nonetheless, the mutual accommodation had little appeal to those who claim to be able to show us *the* castle, or to the newcomer who says that there is no castle: their shouting match continues.

2.2.2 End-game?

At this point the parable ends, even though not all accept the roles allotted to them. But the point of the parable is to activate a response. Phillips appeals to Nathan

the Prophet, who after telling a parable to King David, still had to say, "Thou art the man!" (II Samuel 12:7) The parable must lead to self-recognition.

In philosophy, Phillips states, problems begin when we reflect on self-recognition. To begin, there is a narrator of the parable that determines its point. It should be clear that the parable is told from the point of view of the newcomer. Had it been told by a castle-builder, the parable would have been very different. It is itself "a matter of philosophical dispute, the meaning of the parable will itself be subject to that disagreement." (PTC 164)

We are left at a shouting match that, Phillips notes, leaves the newcomer dissatisfied. In other words, the parable does not say anything about the act of self-recognition that is essential in philosophy. Due to his attitude to castle-building, the newcomer remains an elusive figure to the castle-builders. Phillips spells out the application of the parable in philosophy. The castle-builders are metaphysicians who believe that philosophy's essential task is that of giving a general account of human existence. The account is foundational in that, in saying how things are, it shows the foundations of reality. The newcomer - a philosopher influenced by Wittgenstein - denies that there can be a general account of existence. The newcomer appears elusive to the metaphysicians, because if system-building is understood as the mark of seriousness in philosophy, how can one who rejects such systems be taken seriously? Hence, the shouting match continues.

Reformed epistemologists are those in the parable who try getting around this impasse by recommending mutual accommodation. They question the possibility of a method that can show which metaphysical edifice is the right one. It all depends on what

you think the foundations are, and the problem is that there is no neutral method of deciding *the* foundation. Significantly, there is no way of deciding whether belief in God, or the revelatory power of religious experiences, are allowed to be one's foundations. This leaves everyone free to adopt their own foundations. Phillips asks, "But how free can one be to do this? What if someone tried to make belief in a Great Pumpkin such a foundation?" (PTC 165) This eventuality has deeper implications for Reformed epistemology than its adherents realize: according to Phillips, foundations do not give sense to practice, but practices do give sense to so-called foundations. Instead, Reformed epistemologists settle for saying that nobody can show them that they cannot say that they live in a castle whose builder and maker is God.

According to Reformed epistemologists, the old castle-builders were too ambitious. They thought they could show that only one metaphysical system is correct, that there is only one castle. Rather than saying that we cannot live in a castle until we can prove that its foundations are sound, we should say more modestly that we can live in a castle until someone can show us that we are not. We do not *know* that we have the foundations, but we *trust* that we do. (PTC 165-6)

This metaphysical trust is a great comfort to religious castle-builders; it is an assumption that pretty much guarantees that the scene of mutual, metaphysical accommodation will remain unchanged. If one cannot know the truth about the foundations of their castle, the only castle there is, it is because we live our lives at an epistemic distance from God, the maker of the castle. Thus, we cannot expect epistemic certitude, but one day, all will be revealed. The trouble is that when this 'one day' will

be is rather obscure, since its date is 'at the end of time', which, Phillips notes, cannot be regarded as any kind of time itself.

Phillips leaves the Reformed epistemologists and returns to the scene where the parable ends. For him, the shouting match between the castle-builders and the newcomer is unsatisfactory from a Wittgensteinian point of view.

2.2.3 Vacating Castles

By the end of the parable, the newcomer is portrayed as trying to refute the castle-builder by advocating an opposite thesis. However, this does not capture the character of Wittgenstein's attack on metaphysical systems. By saying there is no such system, it looks as though it is a contingent matter that there might have been such a system. But that is not what Wittgenstein says; what he actually claims is that the entire conception of a metaphysical system is a confused one. Nothing is being said in them. In terms of the parable, the newcomer would be saying to the castle-builders: "No one lives in the edifices you have built. They are simply castles in the air. Put them behind you, and return to the real world." This makes the castle-builders even angrier. The newcomer has the gall to call what they are doing, not false, but meaningless! The castle-builders are likely to respond: "Don't tell me I'm confused. I don't feel confused. You're not going to drive me out of my castle." (PTC 167)

Wittgenstein realized the futility of this approach, considering the likelihood of this reaction. According to Phillips, such an impression can, to some extent, be counteracted by two considerations. First, the newcomer is not saying that there is nothing to learn from examining attempts to build castles; what brings people to build metaphysical systems is related to the deepest problems of philosophy and one learns

sense to them. Phillips adds, "Some, with a weakness for labels, called this new situation 'post-foundationalism'." (PTC 170)

2.2.4 Re-entering the Castle

It is not too difficult to see how religion creates temptations that lead to castle-building; there is talk of a God whose dwelling place is said to be beyond this world. This religious notion is associated with the metaphysical 'beyond' of the castle-builders. In the history of theology it is well-known that theology "has borrowed different metaphysical systems thought necessary to express the foundations of religious belief" (PTA 170). Time and again, religion has been lodged in castles others have built; in vacating the castles, religious notions too will be brought back to their ordinary use. Thus, the religious notion of 'beyond the world' will return from its metaphysical to its spiritual use. Phillips' concern is not with the details of *that* concern, but with the fascination in metaphysical castles. In the contemporary argument the fascination is between radical and conservative post-foundational theologians.

Radical theologians say that there is no such thing as objective, philosophical foundations for religious belief. This is an insight belonging to modernity, in which religion cannot be what it used to be and has to be revised. Religious beliefs are said to be poetic stories that provide us with the visions by which to cope with existence. As a result of not being tied to any notion of 'the independently real', theology can now afford to be flexible regarding the form and content of its poetic expressions. Moreover, given the inevitability of cultural change, it is acknowledged that any form or content will be temporary.

These radicals see themselves as theological reformers who maintain that religion has lost its old foundations, hence the need for revision. Phillips affirms that if the notion of metaphysical foundations is confused, it was *always* confused. Thus, the suggestion that religion once had these foundations is also confused and consequently, so is also the claim that we need to revise religion because of the loss. This is not to say that modernity does not create problems for religion, but that a confused account is given of these problems and that some of them are even created by this very confusion.

By saying that religion is no longer tied to 'the independently real' the radicals unintentionally succumb to the temptation of thinking that the notion of 'the independently real' has *only one* meaning: the exact assumption of the metaphysical systems. Those systems arrived at their foundations by subliming an aspect of human living. Since the eighteenth century, the paradigm for 'the independently real' has come predominantly from science. Phillips appeals to Jean-François Lyotard's analysis of postmodernism: Lyotard calls this subliming of science a *metanarrative*, and its imposition on other narratives *the tyranny of metanarrative*.[4] According to the radical theologians, because God cannot be said to be 'independently real' in a certain sense, then he cannot be independently real in *any* sense. As such, they fall into confusion as they succumb to the tyranny of the metanarrative they thought they avoided. According to Phillips, although the radical, post-foundational theologians have not re-entered the metaphysical castle, they still theologize in its shadow.

The reaction of conservative, post-foundational theologians to vacating metaphysical castles is very dissimilar. They argue that philosophical systems, for too

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[4] J-F. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1991) = PTC 171-72.

long, have shaped theology. With theology now free, it can finally be itself. Phillips has no objection to these theological ambitions, because up to this point, they are reminiscent of Kierkegaard's view that theology should stand on its own feet. However, along with dogmatic theology, there is systematic theology as well. At some stage the latter must confront the relations between religion and other aspects of culture. At this point, Phillips notes, conservative theologians fall into philosophical confusion.

In order to avoid the tyranny of metanarratives, conservative theologians claim that theology is its own metanarrative. Moreover, they claim that theology is the supreme metanarrative that encapsulates all other narratives, including philosophy. With this claim "the conservative theologians re-enter, through a side-door, the metaphysical castle they thought they had vacated." (PTC 173)

The notion of a supreme metanarrative simply compounds the confusion of a metanarrative to begin with. It is confused with the genuine theological task to provide a religious perspective on being. Whether theologians are able to do this successfully will depend on cultural resources and on the spiritual insight of the theologian. Phillips believes that what theology needs to provide is a religious *judgment*, not a *theory* that tries to reduce all insights to its own (PTC 173). Nonetheless, religious and theological judgment relies on not falsifying other movements and their points of view.

In attempting to incorporate philosophy into a theological metanarrative, both philosophy and theology lose their respective characteristics. Philosophical contemplation arises from the history of philosophical problems, from "the sense in which philosophy is concerned with reality, scepticism, the nature of the human neighbourhood and so on" (PTC 174). Phillips specifically understands philosophical

contemplation as seeking to do conceptual justice to the world in all its variety, including the religions within it:

> Philosophical wonder at the world is a reaction to this variety: the different ways in which people think of human life; what they take 'problems' and 'answers' to be; the different ways, for different people, in which aspects of life impinge on each other. This ragged scene cannot be reduced to a metaphysical unity. In fact, the philosophical contemplation of it arises in reaction against the deep, metaphysical tendency to give a general account of human existence. The variety of the world cannot be captured, philosophically, within the confines of a castle. By vacating metaphysical castles, we come to recognise the world with a new sensibility, including its real castles. (PTC 174)

In order to appreciate Phillip's philosophy of religion, it is essential to recognize the three authors that have contributed to his 'sensibility'. Ludwig Wittgenstein, Søren Kierkegaard, and Simone Weil have all assisted in activating Phillips' recognition of the possibilities of sense. The following chapters will bring to light Philips' understanding of these three authors. Beginning with Wittgenstein, from whom Phillips learns the role of a philosophical author, to Kierkegaard, who teaches Phillips what it means to be a religious author, and concluding with Simone Weil, who imbues Phillips with an authentic sense of religious belief and understanding, we come to a greater understanding of how Phillips has been able to maintain the same philosophical position in a time of philosophical change.

Chapter Three

The Philosophical Method: Ludwig Wittgenstein

Dewi Z. Phillips first heard of Ludwig Wittgenstein in David Sims' lectures on language, in the general English course at the University of Swansea. He recalls that he became influenced by Wittgenstein unknowingly. He was first exposed to Wittgenstein not through an explicit discussion of his work, "but through *the way* [he] heard a whole range of topics being discussed." Through those discussions he extracted that "philosophy was not a collection of specialisms; it was one subject, and its central theme was the nature of reality." (OnW 148)

Participating in discussions of the Philosophical Society at Swansea, Phillips heard visiting speakers advancing general theories about language, knowledge, belief, or morality. These discussions would come under heavy attack that led Phillips to a central question: "If the investigation of reality is central in philosophy, why can no general account be given of the nature of that reality?" (OnW 149) Through the lectures of Rush Rhees, Peter Winch, and Roy Holland, Phillips gained a sense that philosophy was a mode of contemplating possibilities of sense, including wonder at the fact that such possibilities should exist at all. In Phillips' work the presence of Wittgenstein's insights show themselves in the way he discusses problems rather than in detailed exegesis of Wittgenstein's work or development.

3.1 Wittgenstein's Philosophical Method

Wittgenstein distinguishes between the difficulties of philosophical investigations and difficulties of self-knowledge: "You cannot write anything about yourself that is

more truthful than you yourself are"; "Nothing is so difficult as not deceiving oneself"; "If anyone is *unwilling* to descend into himself [...] he will remain superficial in his writing"; "Working in philosophy is really more like working on oneself."[1] In these passages Wittgenstein is referring to difficulties in doing philosophy, in giving the problems the kind of attention philosophy obliges. This is not seen if one equates the difficulties with *personal* difficulties. The analogy between working on philosophical problems and working on moral problems comes from the fact that in both cases a resistance of will must be overcome. In philosophy, we resist having to give up certain ways of thinking, but the hold these 'ways of thinking' have is not personal. Rather, they are ways of thinking to which anyone can be susceptible, because their influence is in the language we speak.

In his later philosophy Wittgenstein says that language is a family of games. His problem then, is not primarily setting apart one language-game from another, distinguishing it from its neighbours, but rather questioning the kind of unity language has. As Rush Rhees used to insist, Wittgenstein's *Investigations* is, above all, a work in philosophical logic; Phillips notes, "For Rhees, from first to last, Wittgenstein's major concern is with what it means to *say* something" (PhCP 49). Phillips finds that this is not the emphasis found in the secondary literature concerning Wittgenstein's philosophical method. The emphasis there is on the analogy between language and games, on the fact that language has many uses that cannot be shown to be related to one general form of the proposition, as Wittgenstein thought in the *Tractatus*. Just as we play many games and

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[1]CuV 33-4; *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Personal Recollections*, ed. Rush Rhees (Oxford: Blackwell, 1981), p. 193; and CuV 16 = PhCP 46.

do not ask what they all have in common, we play different language-games and should not ask what they all have in common.

This misses why Wittgenstein says that the kind of unity language has is the unity of a family of games. That claim can only be appreciated against the background of what it is being used to deny; namely, that language has the unity of a logical system similar to a calculus. Language, on such a view, depends on logical principles which are internally related to that language, in which it should be possible to show how any proposition follows from an analysis of the logical symbolism. Instead, Wittgenstein says that every language-game is 'complete', in that its sense does not depend on its formal relation to other language-games within a wider system. Wittgenstein wants to give up the analogy between language and a calculus, though he does see something in the analogy that needs to be retained; namely, that a certain generality belongs to language, i.e. the generality involved in a way of living in which what is said in one context has an interlocking intelligibility with what is said in other contexts. Without this there would be nothing that we could call language. Moreover, what counts as 'sayable' depends on how people actually talk to one another; the connections made will show what is and what is not 'sayable'. For Wittgenstein the wonder is that people do speak to one another in the ways they do.

Wittgenstein says that the various ways in which we do not question certain things hang together to form what he calls our "world picture". The fact that we do not question them is not because of carelessness, but because that very fact is constitutive of our way of thinking, and "is the element in which our sense of what is reasonable and unreasonable has its life" (PhCP 54). However, what are we to say of people who do not

share our world picture? For example, instead of consulting physics they consult oracles. Wittgenstein questions whether we can say that this other way of thinking is wrong. If we do we are simply using our standards to judge it. Wittgenstein does not say that we should or should not do this, but that we recognize what we are doing when we make such judgments.

Phillips remarks that those who want to go beyond a contemplative conception of philosophy characterize those who consult oracles in very different terms and say for instance that such consultation have been shown to be mistaken. The problem lies in finding a wider system that can include both physics and the oracles. There is none, and saying that the mistake can be shown in terms of physics simply begs the question because it assumes that the oracles are consulted out of ignorance of what we know, as though our scientific conceptions make any conception of fate irrelevant.

Wittgenstein's conception of philosophy is contemplative because his aim is to bring us to an understanding of what it is to have a world picture. He is not establishing a world picture; least of all trying he tries to tell which is the right world picture:

> One of the deepest pathologies in philosophy from which Wittgenstein seeks to deliver us is the view that our epistemic practices are themselves hypotheses about or attempted descriptions of a Reality that is logically independent of them. This assumption is rampant in philosophy today. It is one that robs discourse of its reality. Yet, this consequence can come about even when one *agrees* with Wittgenstein's attack on it. Ironically, the very attempt to show the centrality of dialogue in language can be read in such a way that the notion of conversation is itself corrupted. The consequences for philosophical authorship are far-reaching, because a contemplative conception of that authorship is never appreciated. On the contrary, it is turned into a parody of itself" (PhCP 66).

3.2 Religion in Wittgenstein's Mirror

A memorable remark in § 124 (see above, p. 5) of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* is very hard to accept even by some philosophers sympathetic to his work:

the suggestion that philosophy "leaves everything as it is." According to some, it carries matters too far. However, such a reaction does a great disservice to Wittgenstein's work. Wittgenstein argues that when we are puzzled philosophically we stand in need of a clearer view of what lies before us, not just of additional information. This involves coming to appreciate how we have become confused concerning the diverse areas of discourse in which we are engaged. For this reason Wittgenstein says that he is not trying to get us to believe something we do not, but to do something very difficult when striving for clarity: to leave everything as it is. According to Phillips, Wittgenstein expresses his philosophical ideal as follows: "I ought to be no more than a mirror in which my reader can see his own thinking with all its deformities so that helped in this way, he can put it right." (CuV 18 = WR 237)

Wittgenstein strives for this ideal in every aspect of philosophical inquiry. In 1950, the year before his death, he wrote of religious belief:

> Actually I should like to say that in this case too the *words* you utter or what you think as you utter them are not what matters, as much as the difference they make at various points of your life. How do I know that two people mean the same thing when each says he believes in God? And just the same goes for belief in the Trinity. A theology which insists on the use of *certain particular* words and phrases, and outlaws others, does not make anything clearer (Karl Barth). It gesticulates with words, as one might say, because it wants to say something and does not know how to express it. *Practice* gives the words their sense. (CuV 85 = WR 238)

According to Phillips, Wittgenstein's appeal to practice has been misunderstood in contemporary philosophy of religion. Moreover, no single account can be given of it because different things need to be said in different contexts. In "Religion in Wittgenstein's Mirror" (1991), Phillips expounds five different contexts in which Wittgenstein discusses the relation of philosophy to religion.

3.2.1 All Forms of Religious Belief Are Confused

The first context Phillips considers is the temptation to think that all forms of religious belief are confused. The result is that we fail to give religious practice its due because we import preconceptions concerning what words *must* mean. We may assume, for example, that all words operate as names and refer to objects; and when we come across the word 'God', we subsequently start looking for the object it stands for. We may even think that we can come across pictures, such as Michelangelo's painting of God creating Adam, or of the Last Judgement, in which we actually have depictions of the reference of the names 'man' and 'God'. Wittgenstein says of the painting, "we certainly wouldn't think this the Deity. The picture has to be used in an entirely different way if we are to call the man in that queer blanket 'God' and so on" (LeCo 63 = WR 238). When we speak of Creation or the Last Judgement we are not talking metaphorically, or in some non-literal sense. Phillips quotes Wittgenstein who says, "I could show Moore the picture of a tropical plant. There is a technique of comparison between picture and plant;" but this use cannot be called upon where our use of the word 'God' is concerned: "The word 'God' is amongst the earliest learnt – pictures and catechisms, etc. But not the same consequences as with pictures of aunts. I wasn't shown [that which the picture pictured]." (LeCo 59 = WR 239)

Phillips cautions that even those sympathetic to religion may interpret Wittgenstein's remarks in a disastrous way. Some may take him to be pointing out a shortcoming in religious pictures, as though these pictures try to refer to God, but fail because God is transcendent. However, this interpretation ignores the fact that Wittgenstein is striving to clarify the *kind* of picture a picture of God would be. This is

shown in the use made of it; a use that will position the meaning of 'divine transcendence'. The meaning of 'transcendent', like the meaning of any other word, does not transcend its use. If it made sense to claim otherwise, the meaning of religious concepts would be said to be beyond our practices, beyond what we do with them. This would result in turning away from the practices that we need to be clear about. Wittgenstein emphasizes the point accordingly:

> Religion teaches that the soul can exist when the body has disintegrated. Now do I understand this teaching? – Of course I understand it – I can imagine plenty of things in connection with it. And haven't pictures of these things been painted? And why should such a picture be only an imperfect rendering of the spoken doctrine? Why should it not do the *same* service as the words? And it is the service which is the point. (PhI, II iv = WR 239)

It is not surprising to find description giving way to explanation, a habit picked up from post-Enlightenment thought according to Phillips: "Anthropologists, sociologists and psychoanalysts suggested that the belief was the superstitious product of a primitive mentality, unavoidable at that stage of human development" (WR 240). However, Wittgenstein shows that such thinkers are themselves in the grip of primitive superstition: "In other words it's just false to say: Of course these primitive peoples couldn't help wondering at everything. Though perhaps it is true that these people *did* wonder at all the things around them – To suppose they couldn't help wondering at them is a primitive superstition" (CuV 5 = WR 240). What needs to be concentrated on is what the wonder amounted to in people's lives: to concentrate on practice.

Saying that religious belief is necessarily confused fails, philosophically, to mirror its practices. In emphasising this, Wittgenstein calls into question the intellectualist assumption that religion is an outdated way of thinking.

3.2.2 Conceptually Confused Accounts of Religion

We may be participants in religious practices, yet still fail to mirror these practices in our philosophical accounts. This is the second context Phillips considers: giving conceptually confused accounts of our religious practices. He quotes Wittgenstein, who in 1950 wrote:

> If someone who believes in God looks round and asks: 'Where does everything I see come from?', he is *not* craving for a (casual) explanation, and his question gets its sense from being the expression of a certain craving. He is, namely, expressing an attitude to all explanations – But how is this manifested in his life?

This, Phillips identifies, is the crucial question for Wittgenstein, who continues:

> The attitude that's in question is that of taking a certain matter seriously and then, beyond a certain point, no longer regarding it as serious, but maintaining that something else is even more important. Someone may for instance say it's a very grave matter that such and such a man should have died before he could complete a certain piece of work; and yet, in another sense, this is not what matters. At this point one uses the words 'in a deeper sense'. (CuV 85 = WR 241)

Phillips builds upon Wittgenstein's example and uses an elder man whose intellectual powers are failing and who gravely regrets some work he has not completed. Nonetheless, he may come to look at old age and its infirmities as coming from God, and thus influence how he regards his earlier powers: as gifts of grace which God gives but also takes away.

The question, "Where did everything come from?" may lead to this religious reflection. However, when one philosophizes about this reflection, one may do so in terms of a super-explanation. One may feel that justice cannot be done to one's religious belief unless this is done. Phillips notes that dominant philosophical trends may influence such a reaction Wittgenstein was aware of when he wrote: "God grant the philosopher insight into what lies in front of everyone's eyes" (CuV 63 = WR 242). By making this insight explicit, the philosopher neither adds nor takes anything away from

what is there to be appreciated, and certainly does not replace practice with his or her own theories.

Phillips remarks that Wittgenstein's emphasis on practice has been greeted with impatience. In philosophy, disputes arise about whether certain philosophical accounts of religion misrepresent or do justice to religious practices. In such cases disputes may result in a stalemate leading to the feeling that these philosophical discussions are pointless. Nonetheless, Phillips states that the language we use in religious practice may confuse us; we have already seen how we may be tempted to look for the object for which the word 'God' stands for. However, to free ourselves of these confusions we must unearth the tendencies which lead to them. Phillips' work in the philosophy of religion over the last forty years has shown that this is no easy matter. A large part of his work has been trying to give lucid representations of the practices we are tempted to distort. Appealing to Wittgenstein, Phillips notes that he explicitly contrasts this kind of discussion with desires to reform practice. As early as 1931 Wittgenstein writes: "I might say: if the place I want to get to could only be reached by way of a ladder, I would give up trying to get there. For the place I really have to get to is a place I must already be at now. Anything that I might reach by climbing a ladder does not interest me" (CuV 7 = WR 243). In order to dissolve our philosophical puzzlement we do not need more facts or reforms which tell us how we ought to think; rather, we need clarity about the ways in which we do think.

In response to Phillips' work, 'impatient philosophers' may say that if believers reject the accounts of their belief offered to them, their rejection is the last word on the matter. Wittgenstein does not agree:

> 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. For 'consciousness of sin' is a real event, and so are despair and salvation through faith. Those who speak of such things (Bunyan for instance) are simply describing what has happened to them, *whatever gloss anyone may want to put on it.* (CuV 28 = WR 243)

According to the impatient philosophers, we must accept the believer's gloss. This suggestion is baffling to Phillips, for these philosophers would not dream of advocating this procedure elsewhere. Consequently, on such a view, no philosopher could capture deformities of thought in their philosophical mirror because every gloss is to be accepted. It is Phillips' conviction that philosophy must *mirror* practice, not *change* it.

3.2.3 Revealing Confusions in Religious Practices

From our conclusions thus far, it may be thought that we cannot be critical of any religious practice. Phillips notes that an absurd conservatism has been attributed to Wittgenstein, which has been coined by Kai Nielsen as 'Wittgensteinian Fideism'. However, in the third context Phillips considers, philosophical reflections reveal confusions in religious practices. With regard to Wittgenstein's final appeal to practice, it may be questioned how this is possible, but Phillips notes that this is only a difficulty if we think of practice in a too formal or rigid way. If we think 'practice' must refer to something as formal as ritual and say that appeal to practice is final, then no ritual can be confused. Instead, Wittgenstein's use of 'practice' is not confined to these formal settings; by 'practice' he means no more than 'what we do'. If some things we do are confused, this can only be pointed out by reference to other things we do. Phillips quotes Wittgenstein, who writes, "It is true that we can compare a picture that is firmly rooted in us to a superstition; but it is equally true that we *always* eventually have to reach some firm ground, either a picture or something else, so that a picture which is at the root of all our thinking is to be respected and not treated as superstition" (CuV 83 = WR 245).

Thus, the suggestion that all our practices may be confused is itself confused. Whether a ritual is superstitious is shown in its practice; in making this explicit, philosophy is not prescriptive.

Wittgenstein definitively thought it important to distinguish between religion and superstition: "Religious faith and superstition are quite different. One of them results from fear and is a sort of false science. The other is a trusting" (CuV 72 = WR 245). Phillips uses the example that it is superstitious to think that there is some kind of strange connection between sin and worldly punishment. Being distanced from God is not a casual consequence of sin; rather, sin, pride, and envy, for example, create the distance by simply being what they are. Moreover, praying to avoid God's anger is not a praying to avoid consequence, but a praying to avoid becoming a certain kind of person.

Phillips appeals to Peter Winch recalling Wittgenstein's view of religious pictures:

> His attitude towards the acceptance of pictures involved religious belief was not a settled one; and this is one reason for not regarding what he says as constituting a theory. He treats different cases differently and his reactions to particular cases are avowedly very personal sometimes. (I am reminded of the remark in his *Lecture on Ethics*, that on certain matters he has 'to speak for himself'.)[2]

The distinction between religion and superstition is a personal one in that the same religious picture, the same form of words, may be superstitious in one practical context, but not in another. Thus, Winch notes that if we ask whether a given religious picture is confused, then "it is a question the force of which will only be apparent within the life of the believer; it is not one to which the philosopher can give any general theoretical answer" (Ibid. 74 = WR 247). However, whether a religious belief is superstitious is not

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[2] P. Winch, "Wittgenstein, Picture and Representation", in P. Winch, *Trying to Make Sense* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), pp. 71-72 = WR 247.

up to the individual concerned to decide; someone else may recognise that the belief is superstitious when the believer does not. The person who was superstitious may come to recognise this. For these reasons Phillips does not think the distinction between religion and superstition must be turned to in order to appreciate reactions to religious beliefs where every person *must* 'speak for themselves.'

3.2.4 Lower and Higher Expressions of Belief

In order to appreciate how much reactions to religious belief must be personal, Phillips turns to a fourth context – the one in which Wittgenstein discusses the relation of philosophy to religion with reference to the nature of lower expressions of belief. Although talk of higher and lower levels of expression is intelligible, in this context, the distinction does not correspond to that between religion and superstition. Phillips states that there are lower expressions of belief Wittgenstein did not regard as nonsense or superstitious. Wittgenstein may have regarded such beliefs trite, vulgar, or uninteresting, but Phillips notes that in so regarding them, Wittgenstein is necessarily speaking for himself.

As an example to illustrate the point, Phillips recalls an elderly widow asking him why God had called her two sons home before her. She went on to provide her own answer, saying that if she went into a garden to pick flowers, she would not choose weeds, but the best blooms. In taking her sons God had taken the best. Phillips questions whether this picture implies that the longer one lives, the less one counts in the eyes of God. Clearly this is not the case, since the woman does not intend the picture in that direction, for she is simply saluting her sons. As such, her practice is decisive and it need not be confused or superstitious. However, Phillips does not find the picture very

helpful: it may have sustained her, but it would not sustain him. In such a case, the two of them have to speak for themselves.

Underlying the treatment of this example is Wittgenstein' question, "how should we compare beliefs with each other? What would it mean to compare them? [...] The strength of a belief is not comparable with the intensity of a pain" (LeCo 54 = WR 249). The strength of a belief is measured, partly, by what a person is prepared to risk for it, by the way it governs his or her life. These considerations affect what Wittgenstein wants to say about the character of the belief.

Whether we find particular expressions of belief high or low, it is a matter of personal reaction, in which we all speak for ourselves. Phillips remarks that this is something the philosopher of religion ought to point out: the fact that in considering reactions to religious belief, one cannot divide them neatly into reactions of beliefs one finds spiritually impressive, and reactions to belief one finds superstitious or confused. For philosophers, Philips emphasises, "must find room for the ugly, the banal and the vulgar for these, too, may be forms of religious belief." (WR 250)

3.2.5 Pragmatic Relations to Religious Practice

In the fifth and final context Phillips considers, philosophers' relations to practices are seen to be far more pragmatic than they often suppose. Philosophers fear that talk of pragmaticism is just an excuse for intellectual laziness, and they would argue that its result lets people get away with all sorts of confused practices. Phillips wants to show that such misgivings are wrong.

The misgivings mentioned are bound to be seen by those who think that all forms of religious belief are necessarily confused. Nonetheless, as indicated in the first context

(# 3.2.1), Wittgenstein finds this general thesis philosophically suspect. Furthermore, as we have seen in the second context (# 3.2.2), taking a pragmatic attitude to religious practice does not mean that one – be it a philosopher or not - gets away with confused accounts of religious practice. It is clear that taking a pragmatic attitude to religious practice does not overlook superstition (# 3.2.3). Though Wittgenstein distinguishes between religion and superstition, religion cannot be saved from criticism by calling 'superstition' anything open to such criticism just because superstition sometimes takes a religious form. For religion is capable of making a contribution to practice that is distinct from superstition.

According to Phillips, the fourth context (# 3.2.4), probably causes the most concern if one speaks of a pragmatic attitude to what might be regarded as lower expressions of religious belief. It may seem that where such religious beliefs are at stake, their adherents can say what they like. Phillips questions the validity of this statement. If a believer says that the meeting he or she longs for after death were like a meeting between human beings on earth, countless objections would occur. Phillips rightly asks:

> How could one meet one's father or wife after death despite the cessation of the circumstances which give such relationships their sense? [...] And so on for a hundred other questions. Suppose someone responded: 'I know what I mean even if these practical contexts are absent', what then? (WR 252)

Accordingly, without the appropriate practice, such hope of a meeting is no hope of a meeting at all. Phillips refers to A. G. N. Flew who once said that that hope also "dies a death by a thousand qualifications."[3] As Phillips states, it is fruitless to say that it is an ordinary hope, but that one is unaware of the details, for the details make the hope an ordinary one.

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[3] A. G. N. Flew, "Theology and Falsification", in *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, ed. A. Flew, and A. MacIntyre (London: SCM Press, 1955), p. 96 = WR 252.

If a believer were to make such claims, Phillips remarks that Wittgenstein would agree with philosophical objections made against them. However, we cannot assume that the believer is making such claims, since their practice may show that they are not. The hope of meeting a loved one after death may dominate a life without the person thinking about the kind of details. In that sense, Phillips affirms, the hope is a vague one. In the case of someone saying they will see their dead friend, he turns to Wittgenstein who comments: "He always says it, but doesn't make any search. He puts on a queer smile. 'His story had that dreamlike quality'" (LeCo 63 = WR 252). For Flew, the vagueness that surrounds this story *disqualifies* it. For Wittgenstein, on the contrary, the vagueness *qualifies* the story: it shows us the kind of story it is; it is a fixed paradigm that governs a person's life.

Phillips recalls that in *Lectures and Conversations*, Wittgenstein is reported as saying that he himself did not speak of seeing friends after death, but he does not always deny or contradict what is said by those who do (LeCo 63 = WR 253). As such, Phillips notes that Wittgenstein takes a far more pragmatic attitude than many philosophers think appropriate. It is within the philosopher's grasp to point out confusion and superstition when practice reveals it: but there are times when, confronted by beliefs that are clearly important in people's lives, the philosopher can say little about them. Phillips asks, "In that case, is it not philosophically arrogant to want to say more?" (WR 253)

Phillips concludes that these five contexts regarding the relation of philosophy to religious practice cannot be condensed in any 'once-and-for-all fashion'. The same is true of the practices themselves. According to Phillips, these are the things Wittgenstein shows us in his philosophical mirror. While he describes actual uses of language, he does

not interfere with them, nor does he try to give them foundations in terms of preconceived paradigms of rationality. Moreover, he shows how searching for such foundations is confused. In all this, Wittgenstein's mirror shows that he is continually striving after something extremely difficult: to leave everything "as it is".

3.3 Suspending Wittgenstein

Some philosophers, such as A. E. Taylor, have doubted whether this contemplative conception of philosophy is sustainable in discussions of religion. Taylor argues in *The Faith of a Moralist*, that the religious point of view of a person who does not pray will, upon examination, turn out to be aesthetic rather than religious. According to Taylor, the aesthete practices various possibilities and his or her indulgence in them is sentimental, without serious commitment. This account is in direct opposition to Wittgenstein who, on the one hand, said to Drury, "I cannot help seeing every problem from a religious point of view," but on the other hand states, "I cannot kneel to pray, because it's as though my knees were stiff. I am afraid of dissolution (of my own dissolution), should I become soft."[4] This jars with Taylor's view; how can there be a religious point of view that involves a failure to pray? Phillips notes that anyone who has looked at Wittgenstein's discussions of religion, whether or not his conclusions are accepted, cannot claim to find Taylor's aestheticism. (PhCP 59-60)

In fact, a tension in Wittgenstein's remarks seems to beg the questions: "Is the 'distance' demanded in the philosophical search for clarity necessarily at odds with the demands of piety? Philosophy asks that the inquirer does not become 'soft', does not yield, whereas worship is the practice of yielding to God. Is clarity a hindrance to

[4] M. O'C. Drury, "Some Notes on Conversations with Wittgenstein," in *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Personal Recollections*, ed. Rush Rhees (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984), p. 94, and CuV 56 = PhCP 59.

spirituality?" (PhCP 60) To answer these questions in the affirmative would run counter to what Wittgenstein seeks to accomplish: to struggle with the passions without meddling with them. But if we understand "I cannot help seeing every problem from a religious point of view" as a religious remark in a straightforward sense, then Wittgenstein's philosophical vocation would, simultaneously, be a religious one. Phillips thinks that Wittgenstein's remark about prayer and his fear of dissolution must be accepted as the "honest confession" that it is. However, the other remark is not straightforward, since it shows that Wittgenstein's conception of his philosophical vocation is a "*quasi-religious*" one: "Wittgenstein wondered at the fact that the great problems of philosophy existed at all, a wonder that is internally related to the kind of attention he thought these problems demanded of him." (PhCP 61)

Phillips notes that calling Wittgenstein's own conception of his vocation quasi-religious does not imply that it crosses over into the religious domain because we cannot equate wonder at the great problems of philosophy with religious wonder. Wonder in each case is internally related to the context in which it occurs. Moreover, 'quasi-religious' might mean that when Wittgenstein discusses religion, he often speaks as an outsider; "yet his discussion is infused with a spiritual sensibility" (PhCP 62). Wittgenstein said that working on philosophy is like working on oneself. Phillips appeals to Peter Winch who wrote that Wittgenstein "did *not* – like Socrates? – want to make philosophical clarity quite generally a *sine qua non* of spiritual health," and although "he was passionately committed to philosophy and to a rare degree [...] when he spoke of religion as a 'passion' through which one's life must be 'turned around' he was speaking of something different [...] He never spoke of philosophy in remotely similar terms."

Furthermore, concentrating on the quasi-religious character of his philosophical vocation, "it will be clear that a comparison between religious and philosophical questions will not be the key to understanding what Wittgenstein meant by 'seeing problems from a religious point of view.'"[5] According to Phillips, the remark gets its point from Wittgenstein's contemplative conception of philosophy. In Wittgenstein, philosophy is not *for* anything; its concerns are distinctively its own. As Phillips notes, such a conception is not easy to accept, and many philosophers want to go beyond it. In *Culture and Value* Wittgenstein sums up his task, the task Phillips takes as his philosophical vocation: "My ideal is a certain coolness. A temple providing a setting for the passions without meddling with them." (CuV 2 = WR 254)

[5] P. Winch, "Discussion of Malcolm's Essay," in Norman Malcolm, *Wittgenstein: A Religious Point of View?* ed., with a response by P. Winch (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp. 135 n. 47, 128-29, 132 = PhCP 62.

Chapter Four

Challenging Philosophy: Søren Kierkegaard

In the preface to *The Concept of Prayer* Dewi Z. Phillips writes, "I owe more than I can say to the insights of Søren Kierkegaard and Simone Weil. They are difficult, but they are genuine" (CoP vii). Though Simone Weil acts as a medium to express Phillips' religious insights, it is through the insights of Kierkegaard that he gleams his understanding of the challenge religion poses to philosophy. Phillips considers Kierkegaard first and foremost as a religious author. As such, Kierkegaard cannot maintain the contemplative character of philosophy: the Wittgensteinian ideal. Nonetheless, through the use of his pseudonymous authors, Kierkegaard activates the role of the philosophical author. Though Kierkegaard may be difficult to grasp because of the use of his pseudonyms, he can only be genuine by remaining authentic to them.

4.1 Authorship and Authenticity

In *The Point of View for My Works as an Author* (1848), Kierkegaard states: "In this age, and indeed for many ages past, people have quite lost sight of the fact that authorship ought to be a serious calling implying an appropriate mode of personal existence" (PoV 44 = WR 200). He is accusing metaphysicians of losing sight of this serious calling, and he finds a comic pretentiousness in the disparity between their speculative systems and the actualities of human life. He says that they build castles in the air, dwellings no one lives in, and create a fantastic language for fantastic beings.

Kierkegaard, like Wittgenstein, opposes philosophy's foundationalist pretensions: its claim to possess a rational measure by which all our practices must be assessed. Such

a rational does not exist, and no theses concerning it can be 'said'. What philosophy does provide is an elucidatory 'showing' of what our practices amount to, considering our tendencies to be confused about them. Thus, foundationalism's direct method of demonstration is supplanted by an indirect method of lucid representation.

With such a method, Phillips poses the following questions: How can there be serious philosophical authorship after the demise of foundationalism? Can there be a philosophical style? In their struggles with this issue, both Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein adopted striking literary devices. Kierkegaard wrote a number of pseudonymous works, claiming that the perspectives elucidated in them were not his, but those of the pseudonymous authors. Wittgenstein presented his work in numbered paragraphs, in which he engages different voices expressing different perspectives. As Phillips writes. "Both authors endeavour to teach us conceptual differences, without claiming that these differences form a systematic unity" (WR 201). However, the trouble with Kierkegaard's indirect style is to determine his own relation to them. Thus, it is not surprising to find some getting solace in the aim of foundationalists, for no matter how confused they may be, they want to be our guide in helping us distinguish between the rational and the irrational. Given that Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein disown this task, Phillips asks, "how can there be a philosophical voice that is no voice in particular?" (WR 201)

If the tasks of foundationalism are forsaken, does not philosophical enquiry become no more than a form of aestheticism, a parody of, or an ironic play with, real voices? This possibility worried Kierkegaard in his student dissertation, *The Concept of Irony* (1841), suggesting that there is a necessary tension between Socrates' elucidations

of different possibilities and the actual life Socrates has to live; a tension that involves Socrates in irony:

> The ironist stands proudly withdrawn into himself; he lets mankind pass before him, as did Adam the animals, and finds no companionship for himself. By this he constantly comes into conflict with the actuality to which he belongs [...] For him life is a drama, and what engrosses him is the ingenious unfolding of that drama. He is himself a spectator even when observing some act [...] He is inspired by the virtues of self-sacrifice as a spectator is inspired by them in a theatre; he is a severe critic who well knows when such virtues become insipid and false. [1]

Socrates' life is in danger of becoming one of 'infinite negativity': he rejects every definition of piety and justice put to him, he suggest further possibilities, and he never rests in a definition of his own. According to Kierkegaard, Socrates "lives hypothetically and subjunctively, his life finally loses all continuity. With this he sinks completely into mood. His life becomes *sheer mood.*"[2]

According to Josiah Thompson[3], Kierkegaard shares the fate he ascribes to Socrates in his doctoral dissertation: Kierkegaard's use of pseudonymous authors testifies to the activity of a playful aesthete withdrawn from the actualities of life. However, can it really be said that Kierkegaard lacks integrity as philosophical author because he reduces philosophical enquiry to a form of aestheticism? Kierkegaard clearly recognises the dangers of aestheticism in the realm of the intellect:

> One is struck by seeing a clown whose joints are so limber that all necessity for maintaining the human gait and posture is done away. Such are you in an intellectual sense, you can just as well stand on your head as on your feet, everything is possible for you, and by this possibility you can astonish others and yourself; but it is unwholesome, and for the sake of your own tranquility I beg you to see to it that what is your advantage, does not end up by being a curse. A man who has a conviction cannot turn topsy-turvy upon himself and all things. I warn you, therefore, not against the world but against your-

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[1] S. Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony, with Constant Reference to Socrates,* transl. with an introduction by Lee M. Capel (London: Collins, 1966), pp. 300-02 = WR 201.
[2] Ibid.
[3] J. Thompson, *Kierkegaard.* London: Gollancz, 1974.

self, and I warn the world against you. (EiO 14 = PhCP 14)

Claiming that to be a philosophical author is to be an aesthete, the author is accused of simply playing in his or her work possibilities without any character. On this view, a philosopher enters into the possibilities and perspectives depicted and thus lives vicariously. The problem for Thompson is clear: how can the author of such an attack on aestheticism be called an aesthete?

Phillips believes that Kierkegaard's attack on metaphysical systems does not involve reducing philosophy to a form of aestheticism. Like Wittgenstein, Kierkegaard was concerned with the struggle for clarity; working through grammatical distinctions we are tempted to confuse or ignore. Conceptual clarification is an activity that is not easily understood; it is *essentially indirect.* It does not achieve the refutation of a false thesis, but the unravelling of a confusion. Thus a confused statement is not refuted, for its refutation would involve thinking of it as intelligible, but false. The road to the confusion has to be unravelled in such a manner that the person no longer wants to utter it. The unravelling is necessarily indirect, since one has to begin from where the confused one is.

Kierkegaard had particular confusions in mind and called them 'the monstrous illusion'. He was referring to the pervasive illusion in the Denmark of his day that one could be a Christian simply by being a citizen. People who embraced aesthetic or ethical perspectives in their lives thought they were Christians. Kierkegaard did not think that they could be dissuaded of this fact by any direct method, because "there is a difference between writing on a blank sheet of paper and bringing to light by the application of a caustic fluid a text which is hidden under another text" (PoV 40 = WR 205). The pseudonymous works were meant to act as such a fluid by giving clear representations of aesthetic and ethical perspectives. Kierkegaard says:

> If real success is to attend the effort to bring a man to a definite position, one must first of all take pains to find HIM where he is and begin there [...] In order to help another effectively I must understand more than he – yet first of all surely I must understand what he understands. If I do now know that, my greater understanding will be of no help to him. (PoV 27 = WR 205)

Contrary to Thompson's suggestion, Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works are not exercises in aesthetic self-indulgence. Rather, they call for a disinterested reflectiveness in the elucidation of different perspectives. Kierkegaard himself testifies: "So in the pseudonymous works there is not a single word which is mine. I have no opinion about them except as a third person, no knowledge of their meaning except as a reader, not the remotest private relation to them." (CoUP 551 [unpaginated in text] = WR 205)

According to Phillips, if we accept Kierkegaard's conceptual clarifications were brought on by his concern about 'the monstrous illusion', "his conception of philosophy in such clarifications is obvious: it is an underlaborer conception of philosophy" (PhCP 25). Phillips uses the term 'underlaborer' in Locke's sense to suggest that philosophy clears away conceptual confusions to facilitate clear building and clear living. As such, conceptual underlaborers clear up conceptual confusions on one site after another, and asking them where their own site is betrays our misunderstanding since their work is occasioned by confusions that occur on other sites. Thus, philosophy has no distinctive site of its own. For that reason, one must speak of the philosophy *of* something – philosophy of morals, philosophy of science, philosophy of religion, and so on.

Kierkegaard does not look for a philosophical underpinning for his own Christian beliefs. On the contrary, he says: "One single word of mine uttered personally in my own name would be an instance of presumptuous self-forgetfulness, and dialectically viewed would ensure with one word the guilt of annihilating the pseudonyms" (CoUp 551

[unpaginated in text] = WR 205). Kierkegaard's hope is that when aesthetic and ethical perspectives are seen for what they are, those who confused them with Christianity would realise the error of their ways and turn to Christianity. Yet even if this does not happen, and they prefer to stay where they are, at least the monstrous illusion would have been dispelled: "Therefore it is possible for misunderstanding to be removed and become agreement and understanding, but it is possible also for it to be removed and to become real disagreement." (PoV 123 = WR 206)

4.2 Kierkegaard's Qualitative Dialectic

Kierkegaard is primarily concerned with bringing religious conceptual confusions to light. Phillips states that we may call them philosophical distinctions, but Kierkegaard's interest in making them is not primarily philosophical. Above all, he is a religious thinker, which is why Phillips argues that we do not find a contemplative conception of philosophy in Kierkegaard's work (PhCP 25). Kierkegaard's main priority is to free people from 'the monstrous illusion', from confusions concerning what it means to become a Christian. He does provide philosophical clarifications in the course of pursuing it, but these are a secondary consideration. From the very beginning Kierkegaard sees himself as a religious writer in Christendom, and he speaks of his tactics in his pseudonymous works. He insists that anyone who does not appreciate these tactics misunderstands the whole body of his work. His religious purposes are clear writing:

> Supposing that [...] a reader understands perfectly and appraises critically the individual aesthetic productions, he will nevertheless totally misunderstand me, inasmuch as he does not understand the religious totality in my whole work as an author. Suppose, then, that another understands my works in the totality of their religious reference, but does not understand a single one of the aesthetic productions contained in them – I would say that this lack of understanding is not an essential lack. (PoV 6 = PhCP 25-26)

In his "Authorship and Authenticity: Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein" (1992) Phillips writes, "What needs to be emphasised is that Kierkegaard is not simply clearing up grammatical confusions but, in depicting aesthetic, ethical and religious perspectives, challenging people about the meaning of their own lives" (WR 211). According to Phillips, it is Kierkegaard's concern about Christianity that leads him to make the qualitative distinctions that he does to reactivate its grammar, and as such, gives his qualitative dialectic its rationale:

> Kierkegaard's hope was that when aesthetic and ethical perspectives are seen for what they are, those who confused them with Christianity would realise the error of their ways and turn to Christianity. But even if this does not happen, and they preferred to stay where they were, at least the monstrous illusion would have been dispelled. "Therefore it is possible for misunderstanding to be removed and become agreement and understanding, but it is possible also for it to be removed and to become real disagreement." It follows that clarity is in "every man's interest, whether he be a Christian or not, whether his intention is to accept Christianity or to reject it." (WR 205-6)

Thus Kierkegaard, a religious author, creates Climacus, a philosophical author. Climacus, Kierkegaard's pseudonymous author in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (1846) and *Philosophical Fragments* (1844), is a philosopher who is not a Christian, yet is portrayed as having an interest in Christianity. According to Climacus, Christianity is an offence to philosophy, and the methods used to reach this conclusion are said to be thoroughly philosophical: there is clearly a tension between Christianity and philosophy. Phillips does not concede that it is a *necessary* tension. Asking whether a person can come to terms with the Christian revelation can be a religious question. Coming to terms with the revelation involves acknowledging it, taking it into one's life, and living by it. On the other hand, a philosopher may say that it is difficult to come to terms with the Christian revelation, because the concepts it appeals to and the kind of role it plays in people's lives is unclear to him or her as a philosopher. This is a matter of philosophical

puzzlement, in which one wishes to become clearer about what is going on. Of course, there are times when religious and philosophical concerns overlap; but, as Phillips states, it is equally important to observe the differences between them.[4]

Kierkegaard denies that a justification of religion can be provided on the basis of some kind of knowledge. Convinced of the contrary, philosophers are encumbered by the resistances to religion that can be found in anyone and by conceptual confusion as well. To be free of these confusions, a philosopher must unlearn what he or she thinks about religion. One gets rid of what one knows by being reminded of the character of religious belief and by being brought to see how the confusion came about. The seriousness of Climacus' philosophical enquiries does not depend on some religious significance given to them. "What has to be recognised is that there is an ethic internally related to philosophical enquiry: readiness to go where the argument takes us and a desire to let things be themselves."[5] Christianity is part of the world that the philosopher struggles to see as it is. If philosophy is thought of as a struggle for clarity, Christianity should not be thought of as an offence to philosophy.

At the end of *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, in an appendix, Climacus writes that the work is to be revoked. "But in what sense?" Phillips asks. According to him, *that* is the vital question as far as Kierkegaard's relation to philosophical authorship is concerned: Kierkegaard the religious author makes Climacus the philosopher, who is not a Christian, tell us that his work is to be revoked because it cannot answer a *religious* question: "I, Johannes Climacus, now thirty years of age, born in Copenhagen, a plain

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[4] D. Z. Phillips, "Critical Notice" – a review of C. Stephen Evans, *Kierkegaard's Fragments and Postscript*, / and H. A. Nielsen, *Where the Passion Is: A Reading of Kierkegaard's Philosophical Fragments*, 1983: *Philosophical Investigations* 9/1 (Jan. 1986) 66-67.

[5] D. Z. Phillips, "Critical Notice", p. 69.

man like the common run of them, have heard tell of a highest good in prospect, which is called an eternal blessedness, and that Christianity will bestow this upon me on condition of adhering to it – now I ask how I am to become a Christian." (CoUP 545 = PhCP 30)

According to Phillips, what needs to be emphasized is that Kierkegaard is not simply clearing up grammatical confusions; in depicting aesthetic, ethical and religious perspectives, he is challenging people about the meaning of their own lives: "I think it would be problematic to argue that Kierkegaard thought, in a wider context, that philosophical reflection, if carried out with integrity, should lead one to see Christianity as the only adequate positive answer to the question of the meaning of life" (WR 212). Philosophy cannot provide rational foundations for religious belief. Nor can it provide a science of values. The pseudonyms write 'indirect discourses' that endeavour to clarify the role of important concepts in human life. Climacus, as a philosopher, is striving to give an imaginative presentation of the kind of possibility Christianity is; he is not giving a demonstration of the truth of Christianity. He gets us to see that our language, our human finitude, does not necessarily screen God from us. By doing so, he demonstrates the sense of calling God 'Unknown'. According to Climacus, the sense of talking of an Unknown God is found in the language of worship. When worshippers say that they can never comprehend God, they are not making theoretical statements about their relation to God. They are not reporting on some failed attempt, rather they are giving an expression of praise to God that has its natural setting in worship - a worship that consists, partly, in telling God one does not understand. As Climacus realized, "the most difficult task in the philosophy of religion is the provision of telling examples, or the presentation of

examples in a telling way, such that the listener can be brought to give up confused philosophical views about religious beliefs and come to appreciate their grammar."[6]

Kierkegaard's qualitative dialectic does not push people towards Christianity. To emerge from the illusion a person is conceptually clearer in the kind of relationship Christianity calls for. In the *Postscript*, Climacus states: "Christianity is subjectivity, an inner transformation, an actualization of inwardness, and [...] only two kinds of people know anything about it: those who with an infinite passionate interest in an eternal happiness base their happiness upon their believing relationship to Christianity, and those who with an infinite passion, reject it – the happy and the unhappy lovers." (CoUP 51 = PhCP 29)

What Phillips wants to emphasize is that "Kierkegaard's qualitative dialectic gets its purpose, its point, and its character from his religious concern" (PhCP 28). Kierkegaard does not doubt the categories of the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious; his concern is with the confusions between them, and his qualitative dialectic is intended to bring out these confusions.

4.3 Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein

Paying close attention to what Kierkegaard says about philosophy in particular, Phillips finds that Kierkegaard ignores aspects of authenticity in philosophical authorship that are found in Wittgenstein. Kierkegaard says: "I can very well call Socrates my teacher – whereas I have only believed, and only believe in One, the Lord Jesus Christ" (PoV 45 = WR 214). Kierkegaard turns from Socrates to Christ partly because he sees that philosophy cannot determine the meaning of life, and he shows the comic aspect of trying to attach one's eternal happiness to philosophy: "The comical appears only when

[6] D.Z. Phillips, "Critical Notice," p. 76.

the subject with an infinite passionate interest tries to attach his eternal happiness to philosophical speculation. But the speculative philosopher does not pose the problem of which we speak; for precisely as a speculative philosopher he becomes too objective to concern himself about an eternal happiness." (CoUP 54 = WR 214)

Viewed philosophically, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* provides philosophical insights about the grammar of religious belief that are similar to those Wittgenstein provides; this, Phillips notes, comes as no surprise given Kierkegaard's influence on Wittgenstein. A search for clarity is also found in Wittgenstein's work. Phillips appeals to O. K. Bouwsma who notes an analogy between what he calls "the logical aspects" of Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein's investigations: "There is illusion in both cases. The task in both cases is conceived as that of dispelling illusions. The illusion is in both cases one of misunderstanding certain languages [...] But those who seek to understand ordinary language and those who seek to understand the Scriptures run into confusion due to mistaken expectations concerning what the language must mean."[7] Bouwsma says that the indirect method by which such confusions are unravelled is what Socrates, Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein have in common:

> The way to dispel an illusion is not by presenting the subject in a direct way – one must change the person who is under the illusion. No one is going to understand what it means to become a Christian until he has first understood what such a man is before he becomes a Christian. Those young friends of Socrates also had to come to understand something about themselves before they could join Socrates in asking his questions. All of us who learn from Wittgenstein had to come to understand something about ourselves, about our confusions, before we could return to where we were when as children we understood. Philosophy is generally an ailment which children don't have. There is no commonsense answer to a philosophical problem – hence the long way round.[8]

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[7] O. K. Bouwsma, "Notes on Kierkegaard's 'The Monstrous Illusion'", in *Without Proof or Evidence: Essays of O. K. Bouwsma*, ed. J. L. Craft & Ronald E. Hustwit (Lincoln, NE & London: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), p. 85 = WR 210.
[8] Ibid., p. 79 = WR 210.

However, "there is an important asymmetry between Kierkegaard's qualitative dialectic and Wittgenstein's philosophical method" (PhCP 27). Because Kierkegaard's primary aims are religious, Climacus' philosophical insights culminate into a final relation with what they cannot do - namely, make one become a Christian. Because of his religious interests, Kierkegaard's qualitative dialectic emphasizes what philosophy *cannot* do. Thus Kierkegaard is contrary to Wittgenstein in that Wittgenstein emphasizes what philosophy *can* do. Kierkegaard did not want the sense of Christianity confused with the sense of other things, but he did not question the sense he saw in Christianity and in those other things. On the other hand, Wittgenstein wonders at the possibility of there being sense in things at all.

At the end of "Authorship and Authenticity", Phillips retells the story of a time Rush Rhees was with Wittgenstein who was thinking of sending the publishers a nearly completed draft of *Philosophical Investigations*, and how melancholic he was about it. Rhees said to him, "You know that it's head and shoulders above most of what is produced." Upon which Wittgenstein replied, "There's talent enough in it", but kept pacing around the room, scowling. Here is a man deeply concerned with the style of his writing; absorbed with how one can be an authentic philosophical author. As Phillips notes, this contrasts sharply with Kierkegaard's confident assertion that he knew he was a religious writer, and that, through the disinterested elucidations of his pseudonymous works, he was hoping to awaken others to an understanding he possessed. (WR 216)

Kierkegaard wants authorship to be a serious calling, and he protests against the assumption "that one need not enquire about the communicator, but only about the communication." Instead, he insists that we should verify whether an "author's personal

existence comports with is communication" (PoV 45 = WR 214). Kierkegaard writes in his *Journals*: "I surely do not deny that I still recognise an *imperative of understanding* and that through it one can work upon man, *but it must be taken up into my life*, and that is what I now recognise as the most important thing."[9] However, Phillips states that because the imperative of understanding cannot determine the meaning of life in some theoretical manner, Kierkegaard assumes that it can only be absorbed in one's personal life if it serves some other purpose. For Kierkegaard, that purpose is the aim of bringing people to Christianity. Thus Kierkegaard does not give sufficient attention to ways in which philosophical imperatives as such can be taken up into a person's life; as a result, he neglects important aspects of authentic authorship in philosophy.

Climacus' response to the philosophical confusion of thinking that Christianity is some form of metaphysics or a philosophical thesis of some kind – a confusion that is philosophy's distinctive contribution to 'the monstrous illusion' – is to show that "Christianity is subjectivity, an inner transformation" (PhCP 36). Yet, Climacus also asks how he is to become a Christian. Seeing that his philosophical conclusions cannot meet that problem, clarity helps in appreciating what the problem is. This is Climacus' role in Kierkegaard's qualitative dialectic: to show the limits of philosophy with respect to becoming a Christian. According to Phillips, giving the philosopher Climacus this role shows why Kierkegaard does not have a contemplative conception of philosophy.

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[9] S. Kierkegaard, *The Journals*, ed. and trans. Alexander Dru (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951), p. 15 = WR 214.

Chapter Five

Deep Religious Faith: Simone Weil

When Dewi Z. Phillips is not stating and restating the relation philosophy can have towards religion, but deals with an explicitly religious topic, he gains his religious insights from Simone Weil. He regards her as expounding "a true account of deep religious faith" (CoP 106). Simone Weil's inspirations are always close at hand when Phillips tries to reactivate the spiritual roots of religious concepts that get lost through philosophical scrutiny. Unnecessary epistemic divides are often created between philosophical epistemologies and the real context of religious concepts. Phillips appeals to Simone Weil in order to illustrate a faith perspective to such religious topics as the concept of God, prayers of thanksgiving, self-sacrifice, and the pointlessness of suffering. But he recognizes also the posing of philosophical challenges in her work.

5.1 God and Concept-Formation

In his "God and Concept-Formation" (1993), Phillips refers to the work of Simone Weil in order to analyse the relation between concept-formation and the notion of God. He begins by stating that it may be surprising to begin a discussion of concept-formation by referring to Weil's work *Gravity and Grace* (1947), because as Gustave Thibon says in his introduction to this work - "Simone Weil speaks as a mystic and not as a metaphysician" (GrG xxxi = RRC 211). Phillips notes that anyone who has attempted to study her work seriously will have experienced the difficulty of distinguishing her philosophical observations form her religious ones. Therefore, caution is needed in drawing the distinction between mysticism and metaphysics in order to avoid distortion

of the specifically philosophical challenge in Weil's work, something Thibon was not careful enough about:

> I shall be particularly careful not to pick a quarrel with Simone Weil about words. Her vocabulary is that of the mystics and not of the speculative theologians: it does not seek to express the eternal order of being but the actual journey of the soul in search of God. This is the case with all spiritual writers. When in the *Dialogue* of Saint Catherine of Siena Christ says to her: "I am that which is, thou art that which is not", this formula which reduces the creature to pure nothingness cannot be accepted on the plane of ontological knowledge. It is the same with expressions used by so many mystics who speak of the poverty of God, of his dependence in relation to the creature, etc.: they are true in order of love and false in order of being. Jacques Maritain was the first to show, with perfect metaphysical precision, that these two vocabularies do not contradict each other, for one is related to speculative and the other to practical and affective knowledge. (GrG xxx-xxxi = RRC 211-12)

Phillips finds it odd to make such a sharp distinction between speculative and practical knowledge regarding Simone Weil. He understands her as arguing, similar to Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein, that speculative systems often contradict what is evident in practical and effective knowledge. For example, some speculative philosophical systems have denied that we can be certain of the existence of physical objects, while our everyday dealings with them invalidate this claim. As far as Simone Weil is concerned, it is not enough to just note these tensions; one has to explore the tendencies that give rise to them: "The result of becoming clear about them is not the devising of better speculative systems, but a questioning for the need for them" (RRC 212). Weil does not draw a sharp distinction between speculative and practical knowledge; rather she urges to give practice, human action, a central place in our speculations. Only by doing this can we account for concept-formation in any context, whether that context entails perception or religion.

These conclusions, Phillips feels, can be demonstrated by a familiar philosophical puzzle that Weil faced early in her work: How can we be sure that the experiences we

have actually reflect the order of the world? Stated in this way, Weil notes that experiences are thought of as passive in the question. Thus, an unbridgeable gap appears between various experiences of the world. One reason why we have this problem is the neglect of the centrality of action in our experience of the world. Phillips quotes at length Peter Winch's introduction to Weil's *Lectures on Philosophy* (1959):

> Action is conceived, in the first instance, as a series of bodily movements having a certain determinate temporal order. In its primitive form action is quite unreflective. Human beings, and other animate creatures, naturally react in characteristic ways to objects in their environments. They salivate in the presence of food and eat it; this already effects a rudimentary classification (which doesn't have to be based on any reflection) between 'food' and 'not food'. Our eyes scan objects and connect with other characteristic movements of our bodies, we sniff things (or sometimes hold our noses), we exhibit subtly different reactions to things we put into our mouths – corresponding to such classifications of tastes as 'sour', 'sweet', 'salty', etc. – and so on. These reactions are refined and developed as we mature, and some of these refinements and developments are responses to training by other human beings around us. A staircase is something to be climbed, a chair is something to be sat in: compare Wittgenstein's remark: "It is part of the grammar of the word 'chair' that this is what we call 'to sit on a chair'."[1] As Simone Weil expresses it: "Everything that we see suggests some kind of movement, however imperceptible. (A chair suggests sitting down, stairs climbing up, etc.)." (LeP 31 = RRC 213)

There is no sharp break between the conceptual and the practical. Rather, the primitive reactions of which Simone Weil speaks are central in what is meant by concept-formation. In these reactions we are part of, and connected with, the world. Regarding perception, Weil sums up these conclusions in a "striking" way:

> The very nature of the relationship between ourselves and what is external to us, a relationship which consists in a reaction, a reflex, is our perception of the external world. Perception of nature, pure and simple, is a sort of dance; it is this dance that makes perception possible for us. (LeP 52 = RRC 213)

According to Simone Weil, when we reflect on religion we also need to take account of the centrality of human reactions in concept-formation. However, as Phillips notes, when this claim is made, it meets strong resistance in contemporary philosophy of

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[1] L. Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958), p. 24 = RRC 213.

religion, as though some kind of exception is sought after for religion. In making human reactions central in her account, Weil is not adopting a defensive strategy for religion. The centrality of human reactions is just as essential in an account of how our notions of physical objects, tastes, smells, colour, and so on, are formed. Moreover, she is not advancing hypotheses about concept-formation; she is exploring the *contexts* in which concepts have their meaning: "We do not have to understand new things, but by dint of patience, effort and method to come to understand with our whole self the truths which are evident" (GrG 105 = RRC 214). For example, if one wants to understand what prayer is, one must refer to the religious community from which the prayer derives its intelligibility. Unless one's own prayers have some relation to the concept of prayer, one cannot call them prayers at all. This is by no means taking away the personal nature of religion and prayer, but it emphasizes that the meaning of prayer depends on a wider body of religious beliefs and practices. (CoP 37)

One reason, we need patience, effort, and method regarding evident truths is that when we philosophize we tend to ignore the surroundings in which concepts have their sense and to think that we know their grammar before looking at their actual application. By treating perceptual experiences as passive an unbridgeable gap is created between perceptions and their object. The same happens when religious experience is viewed as passive: an unbridgeable gap is created between that experience and the reality of God. Though the concept-formation is not the same in the two contexts, the formative role of human reactions is ignored in both.

By ignoring this formative role in religion, the surface grammar of religious belief misleads us. Questions arise, such as, whether the word 'God' refers to anything, or

whether it 'stands for' anything. Once this happens, we get tangled in grammatical confusions: we treat the word 'God' as a name and ask whether there is an object which corresponds to the name. Simone Weil says that we do this despite the fact that the surroundings of belief in God show that we did not acquire the concept in this way at all. Weil shows that if we paid attention to the actual surroundings, we would see that belief in God is formed through a hunger for an absolute goodness and love which cannot be satisfied by any object, nor anything that exists. Phillips finds irony in the fact that while the sceptic asks for the object, the existent, as the bearer of the name 'God', Simone Weil is insisting that any object one may discover, of necessity, cannot be God. For the sceptic, this is the equivalent of saying that 'God' is a fiction. However, this conclusion can only be drawn by ignoring the actual use of the word 'God'. "This non-existent object of love is not a fiction, however, for our fictions cannot be any more worthy of love than we are ourselves, and we are not worthy of it [...] Nothing which exists is absolutely worthy of love. We must therefore love that which does not exist." (GrG 100 & 99 = RRC 215)

In order to illustrate how the context in which concept-formation concerning the notion of God must be explored, Phillips quotes Simone Weil:

> A case of contradictories which are true. God exists: God does not exist. Where is the problem? I am quite sure there is a God in the sense that I am quite sure my love is not illusory. I am quite sure that there is not a God in the sense that I am quite sure nothing real can be anything like what I am able to conceive when I pronounce this word. But that which I cannot conceive is not an illusion. (GrG 103 = RRC 215)

Weil is not saying that we can have no conception of God; she is saying that if we want to understand what is meant by the reality of God, we should look at what it means to love God. In order to see how the word 'God' is used, we should look to how the word

inhibits the reality of a certain kind of love. Phillips understands Simone Weil to be in accordance with the First Epistle of John, "Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love" (1 John 4:8). For Weil, the 'is' in 'God is love' is not an 'is' of predication, rather we are being given a grammatical rule for the use of the word 'God'. Yet, it is not a rule that needs a foundation by reference to an object thought of as the bearer of the love in question. Here, Phillips appeals to Wittgenstein's term 'language-game': in this context the word 'love' is complete in itself. Therefore, when Simone Weil asks us to consider the sense in which God is love, she is not considering some practical aspect of the matter which needs complement by a speculative aspect. Rather, if our speculations do concern real words, the latter is the context to which we must pay attention to. Contrary to what Thibon would have us believe, Weil is not saying something that is false in "the order of being", but true in "the order of love". Using such a language Simone Weil would rather state that where the reality of God is concerned, the only "order of being" *is* "the order of love". (RRC 216)

According to Simone Weil, it is essential to distinguish between the imaginary and the real in the spiritual realm. How we accomplish this depends a great deal on our reactions called forth by birth, death, the presence of unavoidable suffering, the arbitrariness of fate, the contingencies of time and place. Within religion, concept-formation can go in a number of different directions in face of these. The directions taken may involve fantasies. Phillips uses the example of heeding moral consideration: some people invent a policeman in the sky, an infantile morality, for which religion has often been criticized. Simone Weil believes that such criticism is justified: "[...]what do you tell a child if you want to explain to him that he should never tell lies? If the family

is a religious one, one will explain to the child that God knows everything. This answer to the child's question makes a policeman of God. Obedience which is understood in this way is not a virtue." (LeP 171 = RRC 218-19)

By casting God in this way we make him the mere product of imaginary consolations. Such a god is man writ large, conceived as an extension of human powers: asserting oneself and using the power of one's will whenever one has the opportunity of doing so. She calls such a conception of God a natural god and claims that such an extension is often found in the god of the early Hebrews and the gods of Roman religion: "The religions which present divinity as commanding whenever it has the power to do so are false. Even though they are monotheistic they are idolatrous."[2] She thinks of these deifications of human power as idolatrous, because the promise of compensation offered is a lie. Such promises do not really sustain us when we are faced with suffering: "As a rule our imagination puts words into sounds in the same way as we idly play at making out shapes in wreaths of smoke; but when we are too exhausted, when we no longer have the courage to play, then we must have real words" (GrG 102 = RRC 219). We will arrive at real words in religion only if we put fantasy aside; "we must prefer a real hell to an imaginary paradise" (GrG 47 = RRC 220). For Weil, a precondition of distinguishing between the real and the imaginary in the spiritual is the readiness to face real lose without false consolations: "Attachment is a manufacturer of illusions and whoever wants reality ought to be detached." (GrG 14 = RRC 220)

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[2] S. Weil, *Waiting on God*, transl. by Emma Crauford (London: Collins, Fontana Books, 1959), p. 102 = CoP 101.

5.2 Self-Sacrifice

According to Simone Weil, the notion of God's will is formed through the practice of detachment. Detachment entails the acceptance of the limitations of human life and the acknowledgement that they cannot be denied:

> The beings I love are creatures. They were born by chance. My meeting with them was also chance. They will die. What they think, do and say is limited and is a mixture of good and evil. I have to know this with all my soul and not love them the less. I have to imitate God who infinitely loves finite things in that they are finite things. (GrG 97 = RRC 220)

The supernatural is in a certain relation to the natural, a relation that gives distinctive attention to the finitude of human existence. According to Phillips, the kind of attention Simone Weil is speaking of is a form of love in which necessities become vehicles of grace. Such love states that nothing is ours by right and that we should not make ourselves the centre of things. Other human beings and the natural world are seen as a gift Weil calls love - love of the beauty of the world, an implicit form of the love of God. This is what enables her to say: "Limitation is the evidence that God loves us" (GrG 95 = RRC 220). She gives the following example of how reflecting on the contingencies involved in the meeting of her parents leads her to think of God:

> We want everything which has a value to be eternal. Now everything which has a value is the product of a meeting, lasts through this meeting and ceases when those things which met are separated. That is the central idea of Buddhism (the thought of Heraclitus). It leads straight to God.
>
> Meditation on chance which led to the meeting of my father and mother is even more salutary than meditation on death.
>
> Is there a single thing in me of which the origin is not to be found in that meeting? Only God. And yet again, *my* thought of God had its origin in that meeting. (GrG 87 = RRC 220-21).

However, it is important to note that Simone Weil's notion of love of the beauty of the world involves trials and tribulations as much as blessings. For the love she is talking about is not an aesthetic reaction to an object, but the love of the beauty of *the*

world, and the world is no more an object than God is. And yet, the concept is not given prior to experiences: "God sends affliction without distinction to the wicked and to the good, just as he sends the rain and the sunlight. He did not reserve the cross for Christ [...] No event is a favor on the part of God – only grace is that" (GrG 101 = RRC 221). Love of God is sacrificial for it involves a denial of oneself; "the spirit of God is the spirit of self-denial" (CoP 100). Sacrifice here must be understood as religious sacrifice opposed to the various kinds of self-sacrifice. If one sacrifices one's life for something, one is able to distinguish between the life one has sacrificed, and that for the sake of which one has sacrificed it. Religious sacrifice, on the other hand, differs in that it does not merely refer to the relation between the old and new commitments, but is the essence and meaning of the new commitment. For this reason, "the extreme greatness of Christianity lies in the fact that it does not seek a supernatural remedy for suffering but a supernatural use for it" (GrG 73 = CoP 103). As Phillips notes, precisely because evil has no explanation, suffering can be used to show that one is nothing.

One of the most difficult problems that religion has to speak to is the problem of evil. "Apologetics often takes the form of tired theodicies which try to justify evil in terms of some greater good" (BCFL 78). According to Phillips, it is essential to recognize the pointlessness of many forms of evil in order to realize that there is no reality that owes us one type of treatment opposed to another. Recognition of the pointlessness of suffering may lead to protest, rebellion, or a conception of the absurd. Phillips finds that the acceptance of the pointlessness of suffering in the work of Simone Weil leads to a specific conception of grace, to the recognition that nothing is ours by right; - that all things are a gift from God. He calls attention to Simone Weil's views in

order to make a difficulty clearer: "If we allow her view, that for many [...] would be to allow too much, God being with the believer is intimately connected with the realization of grace in face of the pointlessness of evil." (BCFL 79)

Phillips' examination of Simone Weil's work does not mean that he has solved the problem of evil. He states that he does not know what is meant by a solution to the problem of evil; all he wants to do is make clearer a religious view of evil. In the life of a believer, evil is reconciled in terms of devotion, of one's sacrifice to God. Prayer, as an act of devotion and the dependence of God it entails, is best understood in terms of that devotion. The point of praising God is in the prayer itself, for without prayer, that devotion is not expressed. (CoP 109)

Simone Weil believes that grace occurs as a response to devotion from the midst of suffering. Here is what devotion involves for her:

> If I thought that God sent me suffering by an act of his will and for my good, I should think that I was something, and I should miss the chief use of suffering which is to teach me that I am nothing. It is therefore essential to avoid all such thoughts, but necessary to love God through suffering.
>
> I must love being nothing. How horrible it would be if I were something! I must love with that part of the soul which is on the other side of the curtain, for the part of the soul which is perceptible to consciousness cannot love nothingness. It has a horror of it. Though it may think it loves nothingness, what it really loves is something other than nothingness. (GrG 101 = RRC 221)

Such claims might be viewed as a denial of human dignity; yet nothing could be further from Weil's intention. For her, dying to the self, to being a somebody, is to see all human beings as children of God. It is only in the context of such love and respect that someone can help the sufferer without thinking that he or she is something, and the sufferer can receive charity without feeling bought: "It is not surprising that a man who has bread should give a piece to someone who is starving. What is surprising is that he should be capable of doing so with so different a gesture from that with which we buy an

object."[3] When a giving purchases, it is impure. However, this impurity is to be contrasted with a purity that is rare, but not logically impossible, a giving which does not purchase the one in need. Phillips understands this as a religion of real words, instead of false consolations. For sure, "A test of what is real is hard and rough. Joys are found in it, not pleasure. What is pleasant belongs to dreams." (GrG 47 = RRC 222)

As we have seen above, for Simone Weil the attention found in love of the beauty of the world comprises contact with God. The sense arrived at in such attention does not depend on the occurrence of one event rather than another, which is why she says, "The only good which is not subject to chance is that which is outside the world" (GrG 98 = RRC 222). For Simone Weil, this good is God; it can never be an additional object to all those objects which come to be and pass away. God is not an additional existent, but the Spirit that illuminates all existing things: "The object of the search should not be the supernatural, but the world. The supernatural is light itself: if we make an object of it we lower it" (GrG 118 = RRC 222). God is more real than anything that exists and gives sense to the world of finite things. Weil is not turning away from the supernatural, but locating its grammatical context. The concept of God is mediated through the necessities and finitude of human life: "It is precisely by this antithesis, this rending of our souls between the effects of grace within us and the beauty of the world around us, on the one hand, and the implacable necessity which rules the universe on the other, that we discern God as both present to man and as absolutely beyond all human measurement." (GrG 101 = RRC 222)

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[3] GrG 104 = D. Z. Phillips, "Gifts, Debts and Purchases" in M. M. Olivetti, ed., *Gift and Debt* (Padua (Italy): CEDAM Publisher, 2004), forthcoming.

5.3 Getting it Right

Phillips states that in contemporary philosophy of religion one is faced with formidable difficulties in trying to illustrate the grammatical insights of Simone Weil. It is not enough to note a tension between our practice, what we do, and our speculative systems; we must unravel the tendencies that lead us astray. We have seen what happens when we treat God as a name and look for the bearer of the name. However, to appreciate this we have to demonstrate philosophical patience in paying attention to what lies before us, to what Simone Weil calls 'evident truths'. Yet this is where the difficulty resides, for even when these truths are evident in people's lives, they may still give confused philosophical accounts of them. This happens already in the case of tables, chairs, tastes, and smells; so it is not surprising that it happens also where the word 'God' is used. The philosopher's task is to uncover the source of these temptations.

A second difficulty arises at this point: some speculative systems deny that we can be certain of the existence of physical objects. Yet, attention to practice, to what people do, demonstrates the unreality of such philosophical denials. The denials reveal a misunderstanding of the logic of the language concerning physical objects which is used when people are not philosophizing. The same cannot be said of the use of the word 'God'. Here, atheism amounts to saying that belief in God is meaningless. The atheist does not misunderstand the logic of language, but just finds no place for it in his or her life. Nevertheless, Phillips states that despite this additional difficulty, the philosophical task remains the same: to become clear about the grammar of religious concepts *when* they are used in people's lives. The achievement of clarity does not necessarily lead one to embrace what one becomes clear about, or even to rule out active hostility towards it.

A third difficulty arises in the appeal to the use of religious concepts in people's lives. Simone Weil was certainly aware of the variety of that use: for instance, God might be viewed by some as a policeman in the sky. Phillips states that the crucial distinction between supernatural and natural religion marked for her the difference between the acknowledgement of grace and the deification of human power, and he acknowledges that Simone Weil gives priority to certain religious possibilities over against other ones. She thought that the possibilities she emphasises are central to Christianity and to most of the major religions: the route to God is via hunger and not via an assessment of belief of the kind which preoccupies much of the epistemology of religion:

> We must only wait and call out. Not call upon someone, while we still do not know if there *is* anyone; but cry out that we are hungry and want bread. Whether we cry for a long time or a short time, in the end we shall be fed, and then we shall not believe but we shall *know* that there really is bread. What surer proof could one ask for than to have eaten it? But before one has eaten, it is neither needful nor particularly useful to believe in bread. What is essential is to know that one is hungry; and this is not belief, it is absolutely certain knowledge which can only be obscured by lies.[4]

In this context, philosophical doubts are unreal. Simone Weil does not deny that these doubts arise also for someone who had come in contact with God, although "the doubt concerning the reality of God is purely abstract and verbal, much more abstract and verbal than the doubt concerning the reality of the things of sense. When such a doubt presents itself one has only to entertain it unreservedly to discover how abstract and verbal it is."[5] Phillips believes that this should also be the case for philosophers who pay attention to the grammar of the religious commitment Simone Weil talks about, even if

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[4] S. Weil, *On Science, Necessity and the Love of God* (London: Oxford University Press), p. 159 = RRC 225.

[5] S. Weil, *On Science, Necessity and the Love of God*, p. 158 = RRC 226.

they do not embrace religion. Philosophers' words become unreal when they are not mediated through the realities of human life she draws to our attention.

Conclusion

Trying to Go Nowhere

In his autobiographical afterword in *Philosophy's Cool Place* (1999), Dewi Z. Phillips remarks that more than any other subject, philosophy, with its metaphysical systems, is concerned with 'going somewhere.' After all, it was thought to be philosophy's business to establish whether any of our beliefs were going somewhere, whether they were rational or irrational, whether they had the required foundations, whether our modes of discourse mirrored reality. This was the Enlightenment ideal, and if the philosophy of religion was to get somewhere, it had to show us whether there is a God. Phillips calmly states, "I do not pursue these aims in my work [...]. In this sense, I am not trying to go anywhere" (PhCP 159) - not because of any philosophical laziness, but because he believes that when philosophy tries to get somewhere its task is getting confused.

Phillips takes his cue from Wittgenstein who says, "What *we* do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use" (PhI § 116 = PhCP 161). If this can be accomplished, the result is that we come to appreciate the rich variety in human discourse: scientific discourse, moral discourse, religious discourse, etc. However, these are not isolated games, complete in themselves without reference to others. Rather, they are features of the common language and culture in which they occur, and it is from within these various contexts that we learn to distinguish between truth and falsity, the real and the unreal.

Concluding "The Dislocated Soul and Immortality" (1996) Phillips surmises that many philosophers will say that he has reached his conclusions under the pressure of certain philosophical arguments that have led him to forsake what they take to be traditional Christian belief. Yet nothing could be further from the truth. He states that what he tries to elucidate he has *always* found in Christianity: "When I read certain writers such as Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein, Simone Weil, Thomas Merton and Rush Rhees, they gave me perspicuous representations, in a philosophical context, of what I had already known in a religious context." (RRC 155)

In *Religion and the Hermeneutics of Contemplation* (2001) Phillips calls the general contemplative task of philosophy applied to religion, the hermeneutics of contemplation. This philosophical contemplation emphasizes the role concepts play in human life. In so doing, it faces head-on the fundamental conceptual issues separating the hermeneutics of suspicion, which denies the possibility of religious sense, and the hermeneutics of recollection, an effort to retrieve faith in the face of criticism.[1] In the philosophy of religion, Phillips tries to show that a sensibility should be possible that does justice to both belief and atheism. In this sense, both are rescued from what philosophy tries to make of them. According to him, it is essential to distinguish between the meanings of religious and atheistic perspectives and the personal appropriation of those meanings. As Peter Winch - another philosopher who greatly influences Phillips – says: "Achieving this is a task of enormous difficulty, both at the technical level and also because of the moral demands it makes on the writer, who will of course him or herself

[1] D. Z. Phillips, *Religion and the Hermeneutics of Contemplation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 4

have strong moral or religious commitments and will also be hostile to certain other possibilities."[2]

Phillips identifies four conceptions of philosophy that stand in the way of a contemplative conception of philosophy in contemporary philosophy of religion. First, a contemplative conception of philosophy is at odds with a philosophy that claims to have seen through religion. This group includes analytic philosophers, externalists, and those who use a hermeneutic of suspicion. Phillips notes that it is not hard to see why a contemplative conception of philosophy is difficult to accept in such a context, since it involves getting those who think they have seen through religion to accept that they have not understood it at all.

Second, a contemplative conception of philosophy is not conducive to those philosophical apologists for religion who play the same game as religion's philosophical critics but who hope for the opposite results. If one is rational, they argue, then one will see that belief in God is the best explanatory hypothesis of 'how things are.' In doing so, they give a confused account of religious belief. They also argue that reflection on morality leads to religion and thus treat morality as if it were a homogenous phenomenon. As a result, they fail to give contemplative attention to other moral perspectives, including antireligious perspectives. This group includes evidentialists, internalists, and those who use a hermeneutics of recollection.

Third, a contemplative conception of philosophy creates a problem for some philosophical theologians who are sympathetic to Phillips' work. They share similar views of what Phillips takes to be confused accounts of religious belief; yet, unlike

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[2] P. Winch, "Doing Justice or Giving the Devil his Due", in D. Z. Phillips, ed., *Can Religion Be Explained Away?* (London & New York: Macmillan & St. Martin's Press, 1996), p. 173; quoted from D. Z. Phillips, *Religion and the Hermeneutics of Contemplation*, p. 319.

Phillips, they believe that even confused accounts of religion still do justice to those religious beliefs that need to be revised under the challenges of modernity. Not surprisingly, radical theologians make up this group, as they are all concerned with going somewhere.

Lastly, Phillips mentions certain forms of 'postmodernism' that are also attempts of getting somewhere. In *The Postmodern Condition*,[3] Jean-François Lyotard makes use of Wittgenstein in his attacks on metanarratives, i.e. paradigms of discourse said to be standards by which any kind of discourse must be legitimated. Lyotard illustrates how science has been used as such a metanarrative and how we need to be released from this and other tyrannies of language. Phillips could not agree more, although he thinks this should not lead to the conclusion that one creates one's own narratives and decides how to distinguish between the real and the unreal. Such a conclusion does not follow from anything Wittgenstein has said and is indeed philosophical hubris albeit in a new form. In the old form, philosophers claimed that the rationality, epitomized by their subject, judged whether forms of discourse were well-founded. In the new form, philosophers claim to be creators of narratives that give us conceptions of reality and argue that members of the general populace stand in need of what they have to offer. This group includes Reformed epistemologists who state that their metanarrative cannot be falsified, and conservative theologians who state that religion is the supreme metanarrative. (PhCP 165-6)

While philosophical contemplation tries to do justice to what it surveys, it is not an attempt to arrive at a specific religious viewpoint. Rather, it is an effort to understand the kinds of phenomena we are confronted to in religion. One's own religious views

[3] J-F. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

certainly affect this endeavour; nevertheless, they are different from it. It is difficult to do justice to the world around us. Phillips' main concern is to do justice to the possibilities of religious sense. The inspiration behind this comes from wonder at the world in all its variety, and the constant struggle to give a just account of it.

In philosophy, Wittgenstein attempts to show a city with no main road, in order to do justice to different ways of speaking and thinking. He knows that this contemplative conception of philosophy is difficult to maintain in a technological culture that emphasizes finding solutions. A contemplative conception of philosophy seeks a different kind of understanding, an understanding of the possibility of discourse. Thinking from a certain angle inevitably leaves something left out. But there is a different kind of reflection characteristic of philosophy: reflection on, and wonder at, the fact that people do think and act from such angles with the forms of understanding they involve: "Our reflections are occasioned by the puzzlements that keep recurring concerning the possibility of such understanding." (PhCP 166)

Phillips concludes "Anglo-American Culture: Religion and the Reception of Wittgenstein" (1996) by saying:

> It ought to be obvious from what I have said that the reception of Wittgenstein's insights on religion by our philosophical culture requires a revolution within contemporary philosophy of religion. There is little sign of that revolution happening. On the other hand, however pessimistic that philosophical outlook may be, we must always remember that if Wittgenstein has anything to say to us in this context, it is that religious beliefs and the rejection of religion, which occasioned his reflections, do not depend, for their reality, on that philosophical revolution taking place. It is true that such realities may be eroded by philosophical speculations which lack sensibility. It does not follow, however, that these realities depend on philosophical speculations which possess sensibility. Their sources lie elsewhere. It is only the ***hubris*** of our philosophical culture which makes us think otherwise. (RRC 259)

A hermeneutics of contemplation is a struggle that never ends. Wittgenstein was mistaken when he said he could give up philosophy whenever he wanted. He definitively

attained some 'peace' in resolving particular philosophical problems, but Phillips does not think that he would have talked of a final peace in which contemplative philosophy could be put to rest. Old problems keep coming back in new forms, cultural development occasions new problems. Of course, there is always the philosophical dissatisfaction of wishing one had done a better job expressing what one wanted to say.[4]

[4] D. Z. Phillips, *Religion and the Hermeneutics of Contemplation*, p. 325-26.

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