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# 'WHAT GOD HIMSELF CANNOT TELL US': REALISM VERSUS METAPHYSICAL REALISM

D.Z. Phillips

The paper discusses the confusion which results from equating realism with metaphysical realism. The latter can be influenced by a Cartesian legacy which creates a gap between consciousness and reality. That gap is not closed by philosophies of religion under the influence of empiricism, neo-Kantianism, Reid, or Reformed Epistemology. As a result, "God" is located, philosophically, in an alleged metaphysical space that not even God could tell us anything about. A philosophical contemplation of the life in our words, including religious words, involves bringing them back to reality from a "metaphysical reality" which is a product of confusion.

## *I. On Understanding the State of Philosophy*

Philosophy is a high calling, but with humble subject matter. But how is it to be understood? In contemporary philosophy of religion, we need to answer that question by going beyond what many take to be an exclusive choice between analytic philosophy, an Enlightenment conception of rational enquiry, and postmodernism.<sup>1</sup>

Many who adhere to the Enlightenment conception think that analytic philosophers have turned their backs on philosophy's high calling. They have accused them, according to Nicholas Wolterstorff, of failing 'to ask what reason has to say about religion, and then to listen to reason's voice. Rather than being philosophers, they are, at bottom, defenders of the faith, using the tools of philosophy!'<sup>2</sup>

Wolterstorff should not be surprised at the accusation. After all, he does say that analytic philosophers 'have not only been willing to *describe* religion from within, they have *practised philosophy of religion* from within',<sup>3</sup> and that religious affiliations shape 'in one way or another what they do'.<sup>4</sup> They are what Wolterstorff calls 'perspectival particularists'.<sup>5</sup> He does not think this calls for any apology. On the contrary, 'They make no effort to conceal this fact about themselves.'<sup>6</sup>

It would be a mistake to think that Wolterstorff is simply pointing out distinctive features of analytic philosophy. With respect to the claim that our personal perspectives and commitments shape what we do in philosophy, analytic philosophers, he tells us, 'regard something of the sort as inevitable for everyone'.<sup>7</sup> These meta-epistemological considerations, apparently, affect 'the understanding of philosophy itself, not just ... the philosophers' understanding of what is legitimate and what illegitimate in



religious belief'.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, analytic philosophers 'have not attempted to discover some perch above the fray from which they could qua rational beings, practice suspicion and lodge critique.'<sup>9</sup>

These *general* conclusions about philosophy create tensions for Wolterstorff's argument. Are *they* arrived at from a particularist perspective? If so, how is this supposed to work? Does one pop out, as it were, long enough to make these general claims, before popping back in again to resume one's particularist concerns? Alternatively, if 'perspectival particularism' is *the result* of an enquiry, the enquiry itself cannot be dependent on it. The outcome of an enquiry cannot be a presupposition of it.

Wolterstorff thinks that, sometimes, neo-Kantians give a distorted account of analytic philosophy. In response to them he says: 'the situation is not that we have failed to consider the Kantian alternative, and are still wandering about in unenlightened naivete; the situation is rather that we have considered the Kantian arguments and found them wanting. Kant is not some fact of nature with whom one has no choice but to cope.'<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, Wolterstorff admits that in disputes over the distinction between the phenomenal and the noumenal, 'we live with self-serving caricatures by each party of the other.'<sup>11</sup> Clearly, whether he likes it or not, Wolterstorff is involved in a discussion with philosophers of different persuasions. He hopes they will recognise distortions of analytic philosophy, the difference between an argument and a self-serving caricature, and the shortcomings in Kantian claims. This discussion does not owe its character to 'perspectival particularism'. What, then, *is* its character? It can be brought out by considering Reformed epistemology's critique of the Enlightenment ideal of rationality.

Reformed epistemologists reject the ideal of a *Wissenschaft* based on a conception of rationality thought to be shared by all human beings. On this view, a belief, to be rational, must be based on evidence available to all. Beliefs are justified in terms of other beliefs said to be basic, and thus not needing any further evidence. Religious beliefs are held not to be basic, and must therefore be justified by evidence.

In attacking this idea, its intelligibility is questioned. That is philosophy's concern: a concern with the intelligibility of things. It is for that very reason that we can ask whether Reformed epistemology's conception of belief is any more satisfactory than that of classical foundationalism. Reformed epistemologists can be asked whether they give self-serving caricatures of Wittgenstein and Wittgensteinians. After all, Reformed epistemology is not an experiential or revelatory fact with which we simply have to cope.<sup>12</sup>

Philosophy's concern with the intelligibility of things is as old as the Presocratics. In that sense, it does and must seek a perch above the fray, but this does not involve, what Wolterstorff fears, a recourse to classical foundationalism. On the contrary, Wittgenstein says, 'My ideal is a certain coolness. A temple providing a setting for the passions without meddling with them.'<sup>13</sup> Is Wolterstorff saying that this is impossible? Philosophy is the endless task of giving the kind of attention to the world in all its variety which does conceptual justice to it.

This conception of philosophy is exemplified in a discussion between Peter Winch and Stephen Mulhall concerning Charles Taylor's *Sources of the*

*Self.* Mulhall accused Taylor of advocating a theistic conception of the self, while claiming to have conducted a disinterested enquiry. Mulhall's advice was to be open about this, to embrace, it might be said, perspectival particularism; to be clear that one is 'stage-strutting', not 'stage-setting'.<sup>14</sup> Winch responds: Mulhall 'seems to forget that to stand on the stage and speak in one's own voice is not the only, or even the most characteristic, use of the stage. One also stages dramas, in which a *diversity* of characters speaking in *different* voices are portrayed. Of course, sometimes plays are didactic and it is clear that the author is trying to promote a particular message of his own; but this is not always the case. One need only think of Shakespeare, for instance. The aim may be to portray as faithfully as possible a segment of life, without shying away from the possibility of there being irresolvable conflicts (not merely divergences) which can only have a tragic outcome.'<sup>15</sup>

Applying the analogy to philosophy, Winch says: 'Now there does exist a philosophical tradition which has concerned itself precisely with the problem how to present moral or religious world-views in such a way that the passion behind them, which has to be evident if one is to recognize them for what they are, is clearly in view, along with the conception of the good they embody, while at the same time equal justice is done to alternative and even hostile conceptions. 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 have strong moral or religious commitments and will also be hostile to certain other possibilities ... The three philosophers who seem to me to have addressed most directly and successfully the problems involved in this sort of representation are Plato (writing in dialogue form), Kierkegaard (representing conflicting viewpoints pseudonymously) and Wittgenstein.'<sup>16</sup>

Notice that in speaking of this contemplative conception of philosophy, Winch speaks of the *moral* demands made on the writer, demands which are constitutive of this conception of intellectual enquiry, and the view of it as a high calling. Wolterstorff virtually ignores this central conception of philosophy because, as I have said, he tends to assume that the alternative to Reformed epistemology can only be classical foundationalism. This is important, since it accounts for Wittgenstein sitting oddly in Wolterstorff's reading of twentieth-century philosophy. Equally important, it also accounts for his taking for granted a philosophical assumption which calls for the greatest scrutiny.

## II. *The History of an Assumption*

P. M. S. Hacker writes: (Wittgenstein's) 'contribution to metaphysics is wholly critical, for he understood metaphysics to be an intellectual aberration – a thorough-going confusion of propositions belonging to a form of representation with propositions describing reality.'<sup>17</sup> Wolterstorff writes: '... most analytic philosophers of religion simply take metaphysical realism for granted including metaphysical realism concerning God.'<sup>18</sup> It would seem to follow that, for Wittgenstein, most analytic philosophers would be taking for granted what needs closest attention – intellectual aberrations and thorough-going confusion.

Many analytic philosophers of religion would respond by saying that this clash is due to the fact that whereas they are realists, Wittgensteinians are non-realists. But that suggestion has exegetical problems. If Wittgenstein is a non-realist, what are we to make of the reference to 'propositions concerning reality' in Hacker's remarks? Wittgenstein is not denying, as the sceptic does, that we make contact with reality. He *is* saying that metaphysics distorts what that contact amounts to. Once that is understood, we see that the central issue in the dispute between Wittgensteinian philosophers of religion and analytic philosophers of religion, concerns an assumption that the latter simply take for granted – the assumption that there is no difference between realism and metaphysical realism.

Wolterstorff uses the terms interchangeably. On the very next page, after the remarks just quoted, he says, 'most recent analytic philosophers do indeed take metaphysical realism concerning the external world and the self for granted, and also realism concerning God.'<sup>19</sup> Clearly, Wolterstorff is not intending to *contrast* realism concerning God, with metaphysical realism concerning the external world and the self, since, as we have seen, on the previous page, he has said that metaphysical realism *includes* metaphysical realism concerning God.

Because Wolterstorff equates realism and metaphysical realism, this affects his reading of twentieth century philosophy. Again, contrast Hacker and Wolterstorff in this respect. Hacker writes: 'Wittgenstein's influence dominated philosophy from the 1920s until the mid 1970s. He was the prime figure behind both the Vienna Circle and the Cambridge school of analysis, and the major influence upon Oxford analytic philosophy in the quarter of a century after the Second World War.'<sup>20</sup> These movements were both analytical and anti-metaphysical. By contrast, Wolterstorff describes the results of Moore's and Russell's critiques as follows: 'idealism was beaten back in the English-speaking world; the metaphysical realism which had traditionally dominated anglophone philosophy resumed its composure. The origins of analytic philosophy lie in that realist intervention of Moore and Russell.'<sup>21</sup> One is puzzled: how could metaphysical realism be thought to resume its composure via movements which were anti-metaphysical? The answer is in the misleading equation of metaphysical realism with realism. If one were to write a history of twentieth-century philosophy, noting the development of what is normally called 'analytic philosophy', the use of 'analytic' in 'analytic philosophy of religion' would appear anomalous, to say the least.

This is not a squabble over labels. It helps us to understand why, in their reading of twentieth-century philosophy, Reformed epistemologists virtually ignore the revolution that occurred in it. It helps us also to understand why Wittgenstein found the confusions of metaphysical realism in the very philosophical movements from which Wolterstorff traces the historical lineage of an analytical philosophy of religion which takes metaphysical realism for granted. On the one hand, we have Wittgenstein saying, 'Not empiricism and yet realism in philosophy, that is the hardest thing'.<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, we have Wolterstorff saying, 'the best place to begin the story which leads up to contemporary analytic philosophy is with the philosophers of the latter third of the seventeenth century and

with their eighteenth century successors.<sup>23</sup>

Wolterstorff is right, the problems of Reformed epistemology *are* rooted in eighteenth century epistemology. These problems, however, result from the Cartesian legacy which empiricism inherited. It was that legacy that Wittgenstein turned on its head by exposing its self-imposed parameters.

What are those parameters? The Cartesian legacy takes for granted that the necessary starting-point in any investigation of reality is one's own consciousness. Its central question is how, from that consciousness, I can have any confidence in a reality independent of it. Empiricists, Kantians and Reformed epistemologists differ in their responses to that question, *but they agree on the form of the problem to be faced*. Wittgenstein questions the very form of the problem, by calling into question the notions of 'consciousness' and 'metaphysical reality' which constitute it.

Descartes' legacy has been epistemological, but his deepest problems belong to logic. We make distinctions between 'knowledge', 'belief', 'doubt', 'mistake' and 'ignorance', but he asks whether these are reliable, and seeks an external guarantee for them. His search for this Archimedean point is seen in the extremities of his methodological doubt, his dream argument, and in his conjecture that we might be in the hands of a malignant demon. If we cannot *know* that we are not thus deceived, then, as Barry Stroud said of the dream argument, we lose the whole world.<sup>24</sup> Our most familiar certainties are taken from us.

Descartes finds his Archimedean point in the existence of a God who is no deceiver, but his proof of such a guarantee for even our clear and distinct ideas depends on our idea of God being clear and distinct. Thought is chasing its own tail.

Note the spatial metaphors in Descartes' dilemma: how, from *inside* my consciousness, can I be sure that there is a reality *outside* it? The metaphors are religiously tempting. After all, is not God *other than* the world? But does a metaphysical notion of reality provide the logical space in which God's transcendence is to be understood? In *On Certainty*, Wittgenstein shows how it turns out to be no place at all.

Wittgenstein creates a Cartesian moment in G. E. Moore's Cambridge garden, by alluding to a discussion there which Moore had with Norman Malcolm. Near to them was a tree familiar to both. Moore insisted on the propriety of saying, 'I know that that's a tree'. Why? Partly, no doubt, because he wanted to argue against those who wanted to restrict the use of 'know' to the truths of logic and mathematics, but that is not what interested Wittgenstein. There are plenty of circumstances in which it would be appropriate to make the statement, but these did not interest Wittgenstein either.

What interested Wittgenstein was Moore's desire to use 'know' in the familiar circumstances we have depicted. Moore admits that if anyone asked him how he knew that that's a tree, anything he appealed to would be less certain than his present sureness. It was that 'sureness' that interested Wittgenstein, and the temptation to ask how we can know that our 'sureness' is sure. Alluding jokingly to the Moore/Malcolm discussion Wittgenstein says,

I am sitting with a philosopher in the garden, he says again and again

"I know that that's a tree", pointing to a tree that is near us. Someone else arrives and observes this, and I tell him, "This fellow isn't insane. We are only doing philosophy."<sup>25</sup>

The comparison with Descartes is obvious. There is a desire to be the 'knower' of the world from some imagined point outside it. But are things any better if we look for an epistemological substitute for this metaphysical use of 'know', such as 'believe', 'trust', 'assume', or 'take for granted'? The trouble is that each and every substitute proposed *already* has an employment elsewhere. We are not searching in the wrong direction. We are searching in what turns out to be no direction at all. Wittgenstein would say of all the substitutes proposed – 'believe', 'trust', 'assume' or 'take for granted' – what he says of the metaphysical use of 'know':

'In its language-game it is not presumptuous. There, it has no higher position than, simply, the human language-game. For there it has a restricted application.

'But as soon as I say the sentence outside its context, it appears in a false light. For then it is as if I wanted to insist that there are things that I *know*. God himself can't say anything to one about them."<sup>26</sup>

A phrase such as, 'no higher position than, simply, the human language-game' tempts Reformed epistemologists to think that Wittgenstein is saying that we are locked *inside* our language games, and cannot see the sober facts about the world which are *outside* them. Notice the influence of the Cartesian legacy with its spatial metaphors for meaning. The charge is a bad misunderstanding. It confuses what Wittgenstein is saying with something akin to the 'interpretation-universalism' Wolterstorff finds in neo-Kantianism, where we are interpreters of a world we can never know in itself.<sup>27</sup> Ironically, Wolterstorff's criticism is too close for comfort to a Reformed epistemology which, as we shall see, makes us *believers* in a world we can never be sure of.

When Wittgenstein refers to the use of words in language games as 'restricted', he is not using the word in a pejorative sense. By 'restricted application' he simply means 'definite application'. When words do not have 'restricted application', in this sense, they do not win a glorious freedom, but drift into vacuity and nonsense. In Plato's expression, words become 'winged words'. In Wittgenstein's expressions, language is idling, or has gone on holiday. That is why Wittgenstein says that our task is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their ordinary use.

These conclusions apply to the word 'God' as to any other. Wolterstorff says, 'it is the sublimity of God which limits our understanding'.<sup>28</sup> That remark can and does have a religious significance.<sup>29</sup> If it is thought to entail metaphysical realism, however, we sublime the notion of God's sublimity.<sup>30</sup> It is shown in a false light. God himself could not tell us anything about it. How does this come about?

### III. On Reading the History of a Problem

Wolterstorff says that we need to appreciate the history of philosophy from Locke to Kant if we want to appreciate central issues in contemporary

philosophy of religion. He says that our views on the subject's prospects depend on whether we find this history distressing.<sup>31</sup> But how does one read the distress? What if it resides in the fact that metaphysical realism loses our familiar world?

Wolterstorff writes: 'Locke was a representative of what Reid called "the Way of Ideas"'. On this view, the only entities with which we have any acquaintance – that is, the only entities which can be presented to us – are mental entities. There is a vast range of reality outside the mind of each of us; in Locke there is not so much as a whiff of metaphysical anti-realism concerning the external world. But our knowledge of external reality can be gained only by way of inference.<sup>32</sup>

The question we need to ask, however, is not whether Locke was a metaphysical anti-realist, but whether he was a metaphysical realist. There is ample reason to say that very often he is, and, as a result, cannot give an adequate account of the reality of our dealings with things.

Even if Locke's notion of inference were unproblematic, it relegates most of our existence to the twilight of probabilities. It ought to be remembered that the philosophical tradition which offers us an inferred God, is the same philosophical tradition that offers us inferred husbands, wives, children, friends and human beings. Of course, none of this does justice to our dealings with the world. The only practical effect, as Wittgenstein says, would be to add the word 'probably' to statements which would not normally contain it. Instead of saying, 'I was soaked in the rain', we'd say, 'I was probably soaked in what was probably rain'. We would, of course, have to invent a new word for our ordinary uses of 'probably'.

But matters are more serious. From Locke's starting-point, it is *logically* impossible to get to the reality of things. Despite the fact that Locke says we can have knowledge of nominal essences, the general kinds which denote clusters of qualities, he denies that we can know the real essence of things. Sometimes, Locke seems to tell us what the real essence is, namely, 'the microphysical primary-quality constitution of a thing'.<sup>33</sup> But it is logically odd to say that there is something we do not know, and then to tell us what the something is. Jonathan Bennett tries to alleviate the situation by arguing that all Locke wishes to say is that our scientific discoveries are open to revision. The claim that real essences cannot be known has no more than a regulative function. It is simply a case of Locke, with 'characteristic intelligence, insight and humility (taking) every possible chance ... to stress the gap between the intellectual control we do impose on the world and the science-plus-conceptual-scheme which we might find appropriate if we "cured our ignorance"'.<sup>34</sup>

Even if one accepted Bennett's suggestion, without qualification, misunderstandings of it must be avoided if we are to keep the realism of our contact with things. First, it does not follow that a scientific account of things shows our ordinary descriptions to be incorrect or confused. Physics does not rob us of the solidity or colour of the table. Second, when scientific conclusions are revised, it is seldom the case that no knowledge is attained from their unrevised forms. Third, the possibility of revision to scientific conclusions should not lead to the conclusion that reality is ultimately mysterious. That no scientific enquiry is the last one, indicates that new



questions and interests may arise, not that there is a 'something' which, by its nature, defies our questions, interests and investigations.

In Locke, however, there are passages which suggest that unknowable 'something'. It is these which make it difficult to accept Bennett's view, unreservedly, that we should distinguish between Locke's notions of 'real essence', and his notion of 'substratum'. For example, Locke says:

'The foundation of all those qualities which are the ingredients of our complex ideas is something quite different: and had we such a knowledge of that constitution of man from which his faculties of moving, sensation, and reasoning, and other powers flow, and on which his so regular shape depends, as it is possible angels have, and it is certain his Maker has, we should have a quite other idea of his essence than what is now contained in our definition of that species, be it what it will.'<sup>35</sup>

Here we have a 'something' about which our ignorance cannot be cured. The substratum cannot be 'the microphysical primary-quality constitution', since, as Bennett says, the substratum cannot fall under any description. Any suggested description would be a quality, or set of qualities, needing its support. At the level of particular things, this leads to the confused notion of a 'thing' as a further element beyond all possible descriptions. At a general level, it becomes the Reality underlying all things. Locke admits that this is a 'something he knows not what', but which is known to God. But this 'something' is the product of confusion. If I say, 'The table is brown', 'brown' is a quality of the table. But when I say, 'This thing is a table', I am not indicating a quality of the thing, but telling you what the thing is. We were not taught, 'This is a thing', as though 'thing' is a *kind* of thing alongside tables and chairs. When *all* things become predicated of the fundamental thing, called Reality, the confusion is simply compounded. This reality, which Locke thinks is known by God, and possibly angels, is the product of this metaphysical realism, of the ultimate 'something' which not even God could tell us anything about.

Difficulties with Locke's notion of the substratum, and of what can be predicated of it, are connected with fundamental difficulties concerning the empiricist conception of ideas as mental entities. To have an idea is to have a capacity, it is to be able *to do* something. If we sever the connection between ideas and practice, it becomes impossible to give an account of what ideas they are.<sup>36</sup> In Locke, ideas are self-authenticating; they are supposed simply to tell us what they are. But how is one supposed to know that the idea one has today is *the same* idea as the one one had yesterday? There must be a distinction between what one thinks, and whether it is so. One's idea of a chair is answerable to what we mean by 'chair', a meaning which comes from our dealings with chairs. Of course, I can think of a chair, on a specific occasion, without having any practical dealings with chairs, but such occasions are logically dependent on those dealings.

It is important to remember that our life with concepts includes the true and false judgements we make. According to Locke, that we have ideas at all is due to 'the secret operations' of matter. This will not account for the difference between truth and falsity, since falsity would be as much a causal effect as truth. But the most fundamental confusion of all is when these conceptions, our capacities (including true and false judgements), are

treated as though *they* are beliefs, or even hypotheses, about a reality beyond themselves. This is the metaphysical reality which not even God could tell us anything about.<sup>37</sup>

Wolterstorff finds these difficulties in Kant: 'Reality puts in its appearance to us in the form of the intuitional content of our mind. If it is to do so, the intuitions must be structured by us in various ways. For one thing, they must be subjected to the formal structures of space and time. Secondly, they must be conceptually structured ... The reality of tables and chairs consists, at bottom, of our conceptualizing certain of our intuitions as perceptions of enduring tables and chairs.'<sup>38</sup> Wolterstorff spells out the radical consequences of this analysis. A boundary is created which 'is for one thing the boundary between the intuitional content of the human mind and what lies beyond it. But since that intuitional content of the mind consists of how reality puts in its appearance to us, the boundary is also the boundary between ultimate reality and the appearance thereof.'<sup>39</sup>

The view that the reality of tables and chairs consists of our conceptualizations, comes from the confusion of concepts and things we have noted. When I say, 'There are chairs and tables in the room', I am not saying anything about concepts. I am referring to the tables and chairs. But when I say, 'That is a chair', in teaching someone to speak, I am elucidating the concept 'chair'. As Hacker said, it is only by confusing propositions concerning modes of representation, with propositions describing reality, that the latter are made mere appearances of a reality said to be on the other side of an uncrossable boundary. A 'God' placed beyond such a boundary, is as confused a notion as that of 'the boundary' itself.

#### *IV. Reid and Reformed Epistemology: Continuing the Problem*

The scepticism, latent in Locke, becomes explicit in the progression of thought to Hume. Locke fails to break out of 'the circle of ideas'. Berkeley and Hume also fail. Berkeley said that our ideas of perception have a greater consistency. Hume said they are more lively and vivacious. But all to no avail, since our ideas can be as consistent, lively and vivacious as we like, and yet not refer to any reality independent of themselves. The Cartesian circle remains intact.

Does the circle remain intact in Reformed epistemology, and in the work of Thomas Reid which has influenced it so much? At first, it would appear not. Reid writes: 'I perceive a tree that grows before my window; there is here an object which is perceived; and an act of the mind by which it is perceived; and these two are not only distinguishable, but they are extremely unlike in their natures. The object is made up of a trunk, branches and leaves; but the act of mind by which it is perceived, hath neither trunk, branches nor leaves.'<sup>40</sup>

These words may be thought to show how far Reid is from one version of Berkeley's thought, but, as Peter Winch has pointed out, so far, this simply takes Reid back to the problem with which Berkeley began: what *is* the relation between 'the act of mind' and 'the object perceived'?<sup>41</sup> We are still within the parameters of Descartes' dilemma: how, from my consciousness, can I have any confidence in a reality independent of it?

Reid distinguished between our original perceptions and our acquired

perceptions. The former include the figure, extension and movement of bodies, and their hardness and softness perceived by touch. The latter include the taste of cider, the smell of an apple, the voice of a friend, and the sound of a coach passing. According to Reid, acquired perceptions are 'suggested' by 'original perceptions'. In this appeal to 'suggestion', Reid thought he was doing no more than elucidating our familiar experiences.

Reid writes: 'We all know that a certain kind of sound suggests immediately to the mind that a coach is passing in the street; and not only produces the imagination, but the belief, that a coach is passing. Yet there is no comparing of ideas, no perception of agreements or disagreements, to produce this belief; nor is there the least similitude between the sound we hear, and the coach we imagine and believe to be passing.'<sup>42</sup>

Winch shows how this analysis distorts our notion of suggestion. He asks us to imagine that we are in the heart of a forest where there are no tracks. The sound of wind rustling in the leaves may suggest the sound of a coach passing. Notice, in *this* context, that the sound suggests something *other than itself*. Applying this sense of 'suggest' to the sound of a coach passing, it might suggest nothing at all, or a Christmas card scene. The connections here are psychological and contingent. But when I hear the sound of a passing coach, *that* is what I hear, not a sound which *suggests* that a coach is passing. Reid's analysis distances us from the realism of the sound of passing coaches.

Reid's analysis gets its plausibility from unfavourable circumstances. I hear the sound in the house, but the coach is passing in the street. Sight may correct sound. I hear a sound I think is a coach, but I look out of the window and see it is made by a large lorry. But Reid is not offering an analysis of unfavourable cases, but of standard ones, standard cases which apply to sight as much as to sound. As Winch says, it is appropriate to say that a cloud suggests a camel, but not to say that seeing a camel suggests a camel. Reid psychologises epistemology. The connection between sights and sounds, and what they suggest, is psychological and contingent, whereas the connections between seeing and what is seen, and between hearing and what is heard, are internal, conceptual connections.

One confusion which contributes to the psychologising of epistemology, Winch argues, is the assumption that when I recognise something that I hear, 'the recognition must be an additional process, additional to, and simultaneous with the hearing.'<sup>43</sup> Reid says that when I hear the sound of a coach passing, I have an image of the coach passing at the same time. But, as Winch argues, it is no more necessary to have an image of the coach when I hear it, but do not see it, then it is to have an auditory experience when I see a coach, but do not hear it.<sup>44</sup>

The most far-reaching confusion in epistemology, however, is found in the psychologising of the notion of belief itself. Wittgenstein asks, 'How does such an expression as "I believe" ... ever come to be used? Did a phenomenon, that of belief, suddenly get noticed? Did we observe ourselves and discover the phenomenon in that way? Did we observe ourselves and other people and so discover the phenomenon of belief?'<sup>45</sup> Plantinga seems to answer these questions in the affirmative, according to his account of what happens to him when he sees a horse, or coral tiger-lilies. He tells us,

'When I perceive a horse, I am the subject of experiences of various kinds: sensuous imagery (I am appeared to in a certain complicated and hard-to-describe fashion,... There is also doxastic experience. When I perceive a horse, there is that sensuous and affective experience, but also the feeling, experience, intimation with respect to a certain proposition (that I see a horse) that *that* proposition is *true, right*, to be believed, the way things really are ... So can I tell from my experience that there is a horse there? Certainly. Telling such a thing from one's experience is forming the belief that a horse is there in response to the sensuous and doxastic experience.<sup>46</sup> These views are amplified in what Plantinga tells us about what happens when he sees tiger lilies, or when he remembers what he had for breakfast: 'I look out into the backyard: I see that the coral tiger lilies are in bloom. I don't note that I am being appeared to in a certain complicated way ... and then make an argument that in fact there are coral tiger lilies in bloom there. (The whole history of philosophy up to Hume and Reid shows that such an argument would be thoroughly inconclusive.) It is rather that upon being appeared to in that way (and given my previous training), the belief that the coral tiger lilies are in bloom spontaneously arises in me ... The same goes for memory. You ask me what I had for breakfast; I think for a moment and then remember: pancakes with blueberries. I don't argue the fact that it *seems* to me that I remember having pancakes for breakfast to the conclusion that I did; rather, you ask me that I had for breakfast, and the answer simply comes to mind.'<sup>47</sup>

There are a number of responses to be made to these comments. Let us begin with the case of memory. Plantinga is asked what he had for breakfast, and an answer comes to his mind. But what makes the answer a *memory*? Not the psychological texture of the answer, not the way it feels. What makes it a memory is that it accurately recalls what Plantinga had for breakfast. There is an internal conceptual relation between a memory, and what it is a memory of. Not even God can 'give' one memories without that relation. This has caused difficulties for some analytic philosophers who think that if we are to have a resurrected body, God has to make it out of fresh atoms. It is then said that God will give the new being the correct memories. But since the resurrected Plantinga, so conceived, did not have pancakes with blueberries for breakfast, not even God could give it the memory of having done so.

Second, let us look at the notion of a doxastic experience, the alleged *feeling* we have about certain propositions. Such feelings suffer the same fate as Berkeley's consistent ideas, and Hume's lively and vivacious ideas. We can have as many feelings about propositions as we like. This is still consistent with their not being true.

Third, let us look at the connection between Plantinga's notion of belief and action. Wittgenstein does not deny that an expression of belief sometimes informs us of a psychological state in a person. He gives the following example: 'He's coming! I can't believe it.'<sup>48</sup> But this is not generally so. To say 'I believe p' is to make an *assertion*, and what this comes to is shown by the context in which the assertion is made, not by reference to the mental state of the person making the assertion. What does this look like in Plantinga? The confusions about 'recognition', we have already noted,

leads him to think that when I see a tree or coral tiger lilies, I am appeared to in certain complicated ways. The fact that he finds it difficult to describe these is the unrecognised result of this confusion. Of course, he does not *argue* from the appearance to the belief, but the experience is supposed to *form* the belief. Further, it is a further quality or quantity of belief that gives it warrant as knowledge. But how does this lead to action? Wittgenstein expounds the confusions that occur when we go down this psychologised road: 'I should have to be able to say: "I believe that it's raining, and my belief is trustworthy, so I trust it." As if my belief were some kind of sense-impression. Do you say, e.g., "I believe it, and as I am reliable, it will presumably be so?"' That would be like saying: "I believe it – therefore I believe it."<sup>49</sup> But if this second 'belief', however confused a notion it may be, is *also* a mental phenomenon, is that to be believed to be acted on? And so on, *ad infinitum*, the never ending journey which comes from confusing 'belief' as an assertion with a mental state.<sup>50</sup>

Let me put Plantinga on his horse, with an armful of coral tiger-lilies picked from a familiar garden, watched as he rides in familiar surroundings by long-standing friends. The concept of perception includes tactile as well as visual and auditory experience. That being so, wouldn't it be odd for Plantinga to say, in the circumstances I have described, that he *knows* or *believes* that he is riding his horse, carrying the flowers, etc. It is even odder to say that he is being 'appeared to' by his horse, flowers, surroundings, and friends in ways difficult to describe, experiences which, in Reid's language, *suggest* to him immediately that he is riding a horse, carrying flowers, being seen by friends, in familiar surroundings. If he were to philosophise in this way as he rode, and someone heard him, wouldn't we say to that person, with Wittgenstein, 'The fellow isn't insane, he is simply doing philosophy'?

The reference to insanity is important. It is relevant to the distinction between 'mistake' and 'madness'. Suppose Plantinga could be persuaded that he is not riding his horse etc., in the circumstances I have described, but is using the example in a tutorial in his room at Notre Dame, what would he say? If it were a matter of knowledge or belief, he would have to say that he had made a mistake, albeit a rather big one! But, of course, he would not say that. Think of it actually happening to one. One would be terrified and think one was going insane. As Wittgenstein says in *On Certainty*, all one's yardsticks would be breaking up. In emphasising this, Wittgenstein's interest is not in prophecy, not in asking, 'What would happen if?', but with the sureness involved in our being in the world, with that which we do not question. That is why we run into difficulties when we use 'know' or 'believe' to express our relation to things we do not question, or seek warrant for.

If I were to indulge in theology, I would say of the circumstances I have described – do not speak of being *appeared to* by a horse and flowers, or of *suggestions*, however immediate, of their presence; do not ask as you ride the horse, or smell the flowers, how you *know* that, or whether your *belief* in them has warrant – these realities *are* the horse, the flowers, the friends and familiar surroundings, that God has given: accept them – they are there like our lives. In being thrown back on psychologised beliefs and assump-

tions, as Descartes was thrown back on his ideas, Reformed epistemologists, like the founder of the Cartesian circle fail to break out because of their failure to embrace the sureness of our world, and their insistence that we could always be *mistaken* in any circumstances.

#### V. Natural Beliefs as First Principles

We find naturalist tendencies in Hume alongside his empiricism, a naturalism which has important bearings on the issues we are discussing. In a famous passage, he writes: 'Thus the sceptic still continues to reason even tho' he asserts, that he cannot defend his reason by reason ... Nature has not left this to his choice, and has doubtless esteemed it an affair of too great importance to be trusted to our uncertain reasonings and speculations. We may well ask, *What causes induce us to believe in the existence of body?* But 'tis in vain to ask *Whether there be body or not?* That is a point which we take for granted in all our reasonings.'<sup>51</sup>

Reid says that the belief should be regarded as a first principle. H. O. Mounce argues that it is 'the product rather of the mind's own workings than of what is supplied to the mind by sense experience or reasoning.'<sup>52</sup> This seems to leave the formation of the belief in the external world by the mind something of a mystery. Mounce says that 'children readily engage with external objects. The idea of an independent world is already implicit in their actions.'<sup>53</sup> But, he continues by saying, 'Moreover, it is evident that in all our experience or reasoning we presuppose that we are related to an independent world.'<sup>54</sup> 'Implicit in' or 'Presupposed by' – which is it? There is quite a difference.

We do not handle objects, sit on chairs, climb stairs, react to surroundings in innumerable ways, because we act on a first principle, or because we presuppose that there is an external world. Rather, we act in these ways. If a sceptic questions the reality of an independent world, what we do is to try to get him to reflect on our ways of acting, in ways which remove his desire to advance his sceptical thesis.

Elsewhere, Mounce wants to talk of our natural beliefs as 'transcending experience'. He argues that Wittgenstein's distinction between 'saying' and 'showing' demonstrates how 'the existence of what transcends experience may be manifest in experience itself.'<sup>55</sup> He thinks this is true, not only of views held in the *Tractatus*, but also of later discussions of grammatical propositions such as, 'A is an object'. Mounce argues that one cannot appreciate what the proposition means simply by describing particular objects. But he also says, 'grammatical propositions are entirely parasitic on what shows itself in language; their function, indeed, is to draw our attention to what shows itself there.'<sup>56</sup> Surely, the truth of the matter is that the language and its grammar go together; as soon as one has one, one has the other. As Mounce says of 'what it means for something to be an object', 'The child learns that as it learns to speak, or it does not learn it at all.'<sup>57</sup> Mounce's talk of 'transcendence' simply confuses the issue, but he wants to make religious use of it.

Because of Mounce's starker contrast, in *Hume's Naturalism*, between 'experience' and the mind's natural beliefs which transcends it, Mounce is

faced with the task of explaining the harmony between them. He argues, with Reid, that while religious belief does not justify our natural beliefs, it makes them more intelligible: 'Assume that the world has a Creator and it is easy to explain the harmony between mind and nature which is exhibited in natural belief.'<sup>58</sup> But the need for such an explanation only arises if one accepts the empiricist dichotomy between 'mind' and 'nature' that I have been criticising. It is the same dichotomy that necessitates Plantinga's appeal to the proper functioning of faculties which have been designed according to God's plan.

Similar consequences flow from Reid's discussion of the relation of sensation to our original perceptions. Reid wanted to avoid the confusions of his predecessors: 'All the systems of philosophers about our senses and their objects have split upon this rock, of *not distinguishing* properly *sensations*, which can have no existence but when they are felt, *from the things suggested by them*.'<sup>59</sup> Reid, like Reformed epistemologists after him, wanted to insist that the connection between the sensation and the original perception of, say, hardness, is not one of inference, comparison, or habitual association of sensations; it is not a matter of reflection at all.

How, then, did Reid explain the connection? He concludes, 'Hence by all rules of just reasoning, we must conclude that this connection is the effect of our constitution, and ought to be considered as an original principle into which it may be resolved.'<sup>60</sup> 'Suggestion' is the name Reid gives to this original principle.

Reid admits that his use of 'suggestion' departs from ordinary usage, but does want to draw an analogy with his use of it in relation to acquired perceptions. Winch shows why the analogy does not hold. In the case of a sound which suggests a coach passing, one can appeal to the relation between two distinct faculties, hearing and sight. But, as Winch points out, 'there are no empirically distinguished sense organs associated with sensation and perception, respectively,'<sup>61</sup> where original perceptions are concerned. The sound of the coach, and the sight of it, are two distinct empirical realities. But I cannot, in the case of the hardness of the table, distinguish two distinct faculties, one which feels the hardness of the table, and another which is supposed to feel a *different* sensation at the same time. Reid admits that he has difficulty in locating what he calls this fugitive sensation, sometimes resorting to the desperate measure of saying that we pass from the sensations to the original perception with such immediacy that we are unaware of the sensation we are having! Reid gets into this trouble by psychologising the conceptual or grammatical difference between contexts in which we attribute that hardness to the table, and contexts in which we refer to the sensation we experience when we press on it; the conceptual difference between 'an object of perception', and a 'sensation'. Winch concludes, 'It is a difference in logical type ... and not a difference in empirical characteristics, so that to talk as Reid does, of two different mental faculties, connected together empirically by some queer psychological law, is grossly misleading, all the more so, as the relation between the two sorts of expression he is considering is entirely of his own making, a result of his own illegitimate extension of the world "sensation" beyond that allowed in ordinary discourse.'<sup>62</sup>

By speaking in the way he does, Reid turns logical distinctions into an alleged insight into the nature of things which operates according to laws which are said, in the end, to be God's laws. Thus, instead of being Cartesian 'knowers' of our world, we become Reidian believers in it. We trust our faculties, assume that what they tell us of the world is reliable. But this 'trusting' and 'assuming' come between us and the realism of our being in the world. We trust, without Cartesian proof, in a God who is no deceiver.<sup>63</sup> But ultimate appeals of this kind are based on the confused psychologised epistemology which leads to them. The metaphysical God thus created depends on heaping first principle upon first principle. But what is built is a castle in the air.

#### VI. For 'God's Sake

I have suggested that the form of a problem, determined by our Cartesian legacy, has remained unchanged for many philosophers of religion: how, from the necessary starting-point of consciousness, can I have any confidence in a reality independent of it? I have said little about the metaphysical concept of consciousness involved.

Consciousness cannot tell me who I am.<sup>64</sup> As J. R. Jones has said, it is possible to pick out *my* consciousness 'in the required manner, that is, purely introspectively, only if it is assumed that I inwardly see a number of *different* consciousnesses. And this supposition is senseless.'<sup>65</sup> But so is the notion of a self-authenticating 'This!' by which I attempt to guarantee my identity by a kind of inner pointing to myself. I am who I am, not as an isolated consciousness, but as a member of a human neighbourhood.

Reformed epistemologists say that God is a person without a body.<sup>66</sup> This notion does not do justice to Biblical language concerning God.<sup>67</sup> It is also incoherent. Divine consciousness, so conceived, could not tell God who he is. Further, what would make the thoughts of this divine consciousness, existing in the isolation of eternity, the thoughts that they are? In short, we are back to all the logical difficulties connected with the private language argument.

One of Wolterstorff's caricatures of Wittgensteinians is found in his claim 'that if the Wittgensteinian was to talk about religious belief, he had to talk about the role of religious belief and speech in life; there was, on his view, nothing else for him to talk about.'<sup>68</sup> This is the return of the confusion between propositions which belong to modes of representation with propositions which describe reality. If one is praying to God, seeking God, feeling from God, one is not praying to, seeking, or fleeing from, a role in human life. One is praying to, seeking, or fleeing from, God. But if one is puzzled philosophically, as many are, about what this 'praying', 'seeking', or 'fleeing' amounts to, Wittgensteinians suggest that it is a good idea to look to those contexts in which such talk is rooted. If one did so, one might begin to ask what is meant by saying God is Spirit, or that he is 'other than' the world. One might ask whether that 'other than' is a spiritual matter, rather than a quasi-spatial relation. One might ask what it means to be in the spirit, to long for it, or to flee from it.

I have been concerned to elucidate the grammar of these religious con-



cepts in much of my work, but not on this occasion. On the fiftieth anniversary of Wittgenstein's death, and given the general philosophical ethos of *Faith and Philosophy*, I thought it more useful to discuss, with the help of Wittgenstein's insights, the very different metaphysical contexts in which philosophers have talked about God: God as the Archimedean point in Descartes' thought; God as the source of a reality conceived as the most general of all subjects of which everything else can be predicated, including the concepts in terms of which we make true and false judgments; God as a reality in Kant's noumenal realm; God as the author of psychological laws which govern the formation of our original and acquired perceptions; God as the designer of our faculties; God as an assumption which explains the harmony between 'mind' and 'experience'; God as a person without a body; God as pure consciousness. I have suggested that these exercises in metaphysical realism distort the realities, including religious realities, which they purport to illuminate. That is why, for 'God's sake, it is important to turn aside from them. To see why we have been tempted by them is to see, at the same time, why God himself can't tell us anything about them.

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#### NOTES

1. The debate in *God, Philosophy and the Academic Culture*, ed. William Wainwright, Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press 1996 is largely in terms of this choice.

2. Nicholas Wolterstorff, 'Analytic Philosophy of Religion: Retrospect and Prospect' in *Perspectives in Contemporary Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Tommi Lehtonen and Timo Kristinen, Helsinki: Luther-Agricola-Society 2000, p.154.

3. *Ibid.*, p.155.

4. *Ibid.*, p.167.

5. *Ibid.*, p.154.

6. *Ibid.*, p.167.

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Ibid.*, p.166.

9. *Ibid.*, p.155.

10. *Ibid.*, p.160.

11. *Ibid.*

12. For a Wittgensteinian critique of Reformed epistemology see my *Faith After Foundationalism*, Boulder, San Francisco, Oxford: Westview Press 1995 (Routledge 1988), Part One: 'Can There Be a Religious Epistemology?', pp.3-127. For criticism in an educational context see my 'Advice to Philosophers Who are Christians' in *Wittgenstein and Religion*, Basingstoke: Macmillan 1993.

13. Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, Oxford: Blackwell 1969 (1929) p.2. For an elucidation and defence of a contemplative conception of philosophy see my *Philosophy's Cool Place*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1999.

14. See Stephen Mulhall, 'Sources of the Self's Sense of Itself: A Theistic Reading of Modernity' in *Can Religion Be Explained Away?*, ed. D. Z. Phillips, Basingstoke: Macmillan and New York, St. Martin's Press 1996.

15. Peter Winch, 'Doing Justice or Giving the Devil his Due', in *Can Religion*

*Be Explained Away?*, p.171.

16. *Ibid.*, p.173.

17. P. M. S. Hacker, 'On Wittgenstein', *Philosophical Investigations*, Vol. 24, No.2, April 2001.

18. *Op. cit.*, p.153.

19. *Ibid.*, p.153.

20. *Op. cit.* As far as Wolterstorff is concerned, Wittgenstein, in relation to religion is simply someone who 'exploited the opening offered by the positivists' (*op. cit.*, p.162)! This view of Wittgenstein is endorsed by Plantinga. See *Warranted Christian Belief*, New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2000, p.8, f.n.12. On this reading of the history of philosophy, despite Wittgenstein's reaction to positivism, little wonder that there is so little discussion of Wittgenstein by Reformed epistemologists.

21. *Op. cit.*, p.161.

22. Wittgenstein, *Remarks on the Foundation of Mathematics*, Blackwell: Oxford 1978, p.325. It may be helpful at this point to comment on my own previous use of 'realism' which may seem to contradict Wittgenstein's comment. I have frequently attacked realism in the philosophy of religion. See *Wittgenstein and Religion*, pp.xi, 23, 29, 33-55 and *Recovering Religious Concepts*, pp.5, 239-41. It should be clear that in *all* these contexts I am referring to *philosophical* realism, that is, to what, in this paper, I call *metaphysical* realism. This will be seen from the fact that, invariably, my accusation against realism has been that it distorts what the distinction between 'the real' and 'the unreal' comes to in various contexts. That is why I was against non-realism as much as realism. *Both* are philosophical aberrations. My aim, throughout, has been to replace philosophical realism with ordinary realism. In the Preface to *Recovering Religious Concepts* I say 'What we need, as Wittgenstein said, is realism without empiricism. It is highly ironic that empiricists, who think of themselves as realists, deny that we are acquainted with ordinary certainties in our lives' (p.x).

23. *Op. cit.*, p.155.

24. Barry Stroud, *The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism*, Oxford: The Clarendon Press 1991.

25. Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, Oxford: Blackwell 1969, para. 467.

26. *Ibid.*, para. 554.

27. See Wolterstorff, 'Between the Pincers of Increased Diversity and Supposed Irrationality', in *God, Philosophy and the Academic Culture*, ed. William Wainwright.

28. *Op. cit.*, p.166.

29. For my discussion of this significance in relation to the problem of evil see, 'On Not Understanding God' in *Wittgenstein and Religion*, Basingstoke: Macmillan 1993.

30. For a discussion of eight examples of subliming 'God's existence' see my, 'Sublime Existence' in *Wittgenstein and Religion*.

31. *Op. cit.*, see p.168.

32. *Ibid.*, p.158.

33. See Jonathan Bennett, *Locke, Berkeley, Hume: Central Themes*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1971, p.120.

34. *Ibid.*, p.121.

35. John Locke, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, abridged and edited by A. S. Pringle-Patterson, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1950, Bk. 3 vi 3, 243,

36. See Peter Geach, *Mental Acts*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul (no date).

37. See my 'Epistemic Practices' in *Recovering Religious Concepts*,

Basingstoke: Macmillan 2000 for a discussion of some of the contradictions which come from thinking of concepts as beliefs about reality. For example, since two people expressing the contradictory beliefs, 'It is red' and 'It is not red', share *the same* concept 'red', they would have to be said to hold *the same* belief.

38. Op. cit., pp.158-9.

39. Ibid., p.159.

40. Thomas Reid, 'An Inquiry Into The Human Mind On The Principles Of Common Sense, in *Essays: The Active Powers of the Human Mind*, London. Printed for Thomas Tegg, Cheapside 1843, Chapt. VI, section XX, p.543.

41. See Peter Winch, 'The Notion of "Suggestion" in Thomas Reid's Theory of Perception', *Philosophical Quarterly*, 1953, and his B.Phil. Thesis, University of Oxford, on this topic.

42. Op. cit., Chapt. 11, section VII, p.423.

43. Winch article, p.333.

44. Ibid.

45. Wittgenstein, *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, Oxford: Blackwell 1980, Vol. I, paras. 2-4.

46. Op. cit., pp.333-4.

47. Ibid., p.175-6.

48. Wittgenstein, *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, Vol. I, para. 485.

49. Ibid., Vol. I, paras. 482-3.

50. For a fuller discussion see my 'On Really Believing' in *Wittgenstein and Religion*.

51. Hume, *A Treatise on Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge and P.H. Nidditch, Oxford: The Clarendon Press 1978, Bk. I, Part IV, p.187.

52. H. O. Mounce, *Hume's Naturalism*, London: Routledge 1999, p.53.

53. Ibid., p.58.

54. Ibid.

55. Critical Notice of *The New Wittgenstein*, ed. Alice Crary and Rupert Read in *Philosophical Investigations*, Vol. 24, No. 2, April 2001.

56. Ibid.

57. Ibid.

58. Mounce, *Hume's Naturalism*, p.13.

59. Op. cit., Chapt. V, section IX, p.454.

60. Ibid., Chapt. V, section III, pp.443-4.

61. Winch article, p.339.

62. Ibid.

63. I have argued that the notion of 'trust' as 'reliance' does not do justice to religious conceptions of trust. See 'On Trusting Intellectuals on Trust' in *Philosophical Investigations*, Vol. 24, No. 4, October 2001 and 'Trust It!' in *Bijdragen. International Journal in Philosophy and Theology*, Vol. 60, No. 4, December 1999.

64. See my 'The World and "I"' in *Recovering Religious Concepts*, Basingstoke: Macmillan and New York: St. Martin's Press 2000.

65. J. R. Jones, 'How Do I Know Who I Am?', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supp. Vol. 41, 1967, p.2.

66. See Plantinga, op. cit., p.3.

67. For a perceptive argument to this effect see Patrick Sherry, 'Are Spirits Bodiless Persons?', *Neue Zeitschrift fur Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie*, Vol. 24, No. 1, 1982, pp.37-52.

68. Wolterstorff, op. cit., p.163.