

Left Wing Fideism: A Critique of Non-Cognitivism

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Abstract

The non-cognitivist analysis of Religious Language often uses remarks from the later writings to Ludwig Wittgenstein to try and build a non-cognitivist apologetic for Christian belief. The “Concept of Prayer” by D.Z. Phillips represents this approach to the analysis of Religious Language. The crucial defect in Phillips account of the logic of religious language is that he assumes that it is single leveled. Once ‘depth’ grammar has revealed what logic of God is like, this univocal logic can be applied to every religious statement, and any religious statement which does not fit into this account, must be reduced to a statement which will, or be eliminated from religious discourse. Phillips uses Wittgenstein’s insight that words and statements only have meaning in the stream of life, to prop up a doctrine which leads back to the dogma, to mean is to name. This paper argues that any such approach finds it difficult not to distort the ordinary meaning of Religious Language and attempts to offer a detailed critique of this position.

KEY WORDS: Non-Cognitivism, Religious Language, Ludwig Wittgenstein, D.Z. Phillips

Phillips’ Epistemology

The Logical Nature of the Non-Cognitivist Dispute

How is it possible to decide whether or not the cognitivist or the non-cognitivist provides the correct epistemological analysis of religious statement? The Creeds and the prayers which Christians seem to make factual claims at several different levels about the nature of God and the actions and status of Jesus Christ.

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

Thus despite Phillips claims that he uncovers the ‘depth’ grammar of religious utterances, the cognitivists-non-cognitivist dispute is not, ‘Do religious statements or assertions as a matter of fact contain cognitive elements?’ rather it is the question, ‘Are statements or assertions which have some fact claiming elements, the most appropriate sorts of statements by means of which to make religious assertions, to formulate prayers, to write liturgies, to construct dogmatic systems?’

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

The question as to the worship-worthiness of a God is, not merely a factual question. It can be restated as ‘Which god ought I to worship?’ The cognitivist will obviously answer: The god whose existence is a logical possibility. The non-cognitivist will answer: The god to which specified religious attitudes are the most appropriate. But how do I decide which god is the most worship worthy? The attempt to answer this question involves not only the factual question of what various concepts of God there are, but also the evaluative question of which god ought to be worshipped. However if this question is to be answered, it is clear that the answer will involve attempts to persuade others that a given concept of God is the best one, and attempts to comment one concept of God rather than another.

Persuasive Definition

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

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

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

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

Phillips also uses the slogans 'every statement has its own logic', and 'don't ask for meaning ask for use' to make stronger claim: this is the claim that if a statement or set of statements have a use, if a language game is played, then the reality of the concepts employed in the language game is used. Thus he writes: "To say, 'This is the true God' is to believe in Him, and worship Him."² Or again Phillips endorses Malcom's statement: "In those complex systems of thought, those 'language games', God has the status of a necessary being. Who can doubt that? Here we must say with Wittgenstein, 'This language game is played'.³

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

What Does Phillips' Stronger Thesis Prove?

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

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

The 'a priori' character of the strong meaning equals usage thesis is illustrated by Peter Winch both in *The Idea of a Social Science* and in *Understanding in a Primitive Society*. Winch claims that the concept of 'reality', the concept of 'truth', the concept of 'logic' in a given society or universe of discourse is wholly determined by the language game in which these concepts are used. For example, to suppose that the modern scientific outlook has shown Azande witchcraft to be nothing but superstition, is to ignore the

² The Concept of Prayer, p.149

³ The Concept of Prayer, p.18

employment of witchcraft language game by the Azande people. The problem which Winch builds round himself is that if there is no common logical form, no common concept of truth and reality which cross-crosses and interlocks with all the diverse possible language games how can different cultures such as those of Modern Western society and that of Azande tribes ever communicate at all? Each has its own language game, but each game subsists, granted that they have no common logical form, in splendid isolation.

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

Winch wishes to reject the comparison of Christian baptism with other instances of ritual purification. The grounds of his rejection of these interesting comparisons are clear enough: if he is to explain baptism 'a priori', the rite must be deducible a set of conventions, or espoused theory, i.e. Christian theology and ritual. If Church historians were to find the roots of Christian baptism in earlier rites of purification, his thesis would entail assertions of temporal, and perhaps casual sequence, which would require empirical research. To say that an action is a convention is to say among other things that it is not idiosyncratic, and this is a truth that can be discovered only by observation. It is surely not discoverable by lexicography or grammar along.⁴

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

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

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

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

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

This point raises another issue about the stronger thesis: How can it account for illustrations and delusions. If my understanding X and my believing X are not merely simultaneous, but are identical, can I ever be said to suffer an illusion? Certainly if this thesis is correct there can be no concept, however open textured of reality and unreality, of truth and falsehood; the concept of reality and unreality are internal to the language game which is being played. Phillips writes: “One cannot contrast something called ‘hallucinatory prayer’ with something else called ‘normal prayer’. One cannot contrast hallucinatory experiences of the Virgin Mary with normal experiences of the Virgin Mary.”⁵

The internal criteria which determine the reality or unreality of the vision are the compatibility of the vision or prayer with the religious tradition in which the vision or prayer is claimed to have taken place. “One may claim to have had a religiously significant vision, but whether the vision has such religious significance is determined by the religion within which the vision is experienced, or at least, by the religion which influences the vision.”⁶

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

Phillips makes a similar definitional victory in refusing to allow a distinction between ‘Normal’ and ‘odd’, or ‘self-deceiving’ acts of prayer. He writes: “In prayer what is said can only be said directly to God. This is an analytic statement, since what is said is God’s language as it were.”⁷ This statement is true only if it made so by definition. Suppose someone says, ‘I pray every night, but I never pray to God, but to the Virgin Mary.’ Phillips would presumably reply to such an instance, that may be what is said at an

⁵ Op Cit. p.33

⁶ Phillips Op.cit.p.36

⁷ Op.Cit. p.52

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

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

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

A further consequence of this reduction of understanding to belief is that our knowledge of God is restricted to "knowing how". Religious knowledge for Phillips is not a "knowing that" the world is of such and such a nature, and that it is related to God in such and such a way; rather it is "knowing" how to play the religious language game, a "knowing how" to pray, and how to pray aright. He writes: "To say 'This is the true God' is to believe in Him, and worship Him"⁸

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

Phillips strong meaning equals usage thesis however is claiming more than that many people can know how to pray to God without knowing the correct philosophical analysis of the relation of a man who is praying to the God to whom he prays. He is saying that if I know how to pray, neither I nor anyone else needs to get worried about what it is to know the rules, regulations and theories about God's relation to man in prayer. Phillips gets rid of the possibility of the misuse of prayers, and of the possibility of hallucinatory visions: If "knowing how" and "knowing that" are identical, no conceptual criticism of a "knowing how" is possible. But surely "knowing how" is in the end parasitical for its justification on knowing that: I know that to make my ear go faster or slow down, I can take my foot off the accelerator and put it on without thinking about what I am doing

⁸ Op.cit.p.149

when I do this. But my knowing how to operate the accelerator presupposes that someone knows that depressing the accelerator increases the flow of petrol to the engine and increases the frequency of the explosion in the cylinders.

Similarly in the case of prayer; many Christians know how to pray to God: and about what sort of a God it is who is interested in our prayers, and who cares sufficiently about this creation to listen to the supplications of this creatures.

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

Prayer and Ordinary Language

The Concept of Prayer claims to be an examination of the ordinary use of prayers. Phillips implies that God is a logically necessary being. All religious activity must be restricted by the nature of the God towards whom this activity is directed. Barth similarly argues that the nature of the God towards whom this activity is directed. Barth similarly argues that the nature of dogmatics must be determined by the object it studies (i.e. God). But Barth’s God is free to reveal himself, or to refuse to do so as he sees fit. The God conjured into existence by the ontological argument has not got this absolute freedom: he is logically necessary being, and in the nature of the case is unchanging and unchangeable. Phillips refuses to allow any type of prayer which it is not appropriate to offer to a logically necessary being to be genuine prayer. He attempts to reduce all types of prayer which will not be appropriate to his concept of God, to types which are appropriate. Phillips accepts prayers of confession and thanksgiving as genuine prayers, but subtly changes the meanings these types of prayer possess in ordinary usage.

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

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

For Phillips, the forgiveness appropriate to an act of confession does not seem to be an act on God’s part; it is a means of getting to know oneself. Thus “in coming to know

⁹ 1928 Prayer Book p.346

God one comes to know oneself.”¹⁰ Belief in God is a necessary condition of self-understanding, but God in no way participates actively in this process of self-forgiveness. It is hard to see how Phillips attaches any meaning to the opening sentence of the traditional Anglican canon of consecration:

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, who of the tender mercy didst give only son Jesus Christ to suffer death upon the cross for our redemption; who made there (by his one oblation of himself once offered) a full perfect sufficient, sacrifice and satisfaction for the sins of the world.¹¹

Prayers of thanksgiving are also treated in a reductionist manner by Phillips. A genuine prayer of thanksgiving is, he asserts, not thanking God for this or that, but thanking God for the whole of existence. This is not the ordinary usage of thanksgiving¹² where various features of existence are singled out as meriting thanksgiving, but in particular “the redemption of our Lord Jesus, Christ”.

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

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

Prayers which cannot be offered to a God who is logically necessary being, Phillips dismisses as superstitious. “In the face of prayers which do not fit readily into my exposition, all I can do is to note them and leave it at that. I do not say that they are not

¹⁰ Op.cit.p.63

¹¹ 1928 Prayer Book, p.349

¹² 1928 Prayer Book, p. 151

¹³ “In J.R. Jones “Love as the Perception of meaning.”Phillips: Religion and understanding. P.52

prayers (who is philosopher to say that?) but simply that I do not understand what I is involved in them”.¹⁴

The most obvious example of prayer which is inappropriate to a logically necessary being is petitionary, or intercessory prayer. Ordinary language suggests that a large part of our public and private prayer is intercessory; that is it asks God to make some change either in the state of affairs in the world, or in the spiritual state of ourselves or of others. For example, the collect for the fifth Sunday after Trinity runs: “Grant O Lord we beseech thee that the course of this world may be so peaceably ordered by the governance, that the Church may joyfully serve thee in all Godly quietness, through Jesus Christ our Lord”. Similarly, the Collect for Sunday before Advent runs: “ Stir up, we beseech thee, O lord, the wills of thy faithful people , that they say plenteously bring forth the fruit of good work, and say of thee be plenteously rewarded.”¹⁵ As far as private prayers are concerned, I can only speak from my own experience, but I do find myself frequently praying for specific solutions to specific problems: for peace in Vietnam, for an end to the cold war, for the safe journey of a friend, for a relation in sickness and so on.

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

God for Phillips is unchanging and omniscient. It is therefore impossible to tell God anything he does not already know. Further: if both is an unchanging logically necessary being, and he knows everything that is going to happen in the future, is not the possibility of the existence of contingent events in his creation ruled out? If God has planned from eternity everything that is going to happen in the universe and God’s nature is unchanging what is the point in asking for an alteration in the detail of the history of the universe? For theological determinists, part of God’s plan could be that people will use petitionary prayers at certain points in the plan, and yes or no answers built into the course of events will be part of the plan from the beginning. The difficulty about petitionary prayer in this type of metaphysic is that the petitioner’s questions and answers are all engineered: part of the meaning of saying ‘I ask X’ or ‘I grant X’ is that I need not have asked if I had not wanted to, and that my prayer need not have been answered.

A remarkable feature of Phillips supposedly empirical analysis is his lack of discussion of the New Testaments notions of prayer. The one quotation he does offer

¹⁴ Op.cit. p.8

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

¹⁶ Op.Cit. p.121

suggests a reference to Christ's words in the garden of Gethsemane: "Thy will not Mine be done".¹⁷ He goes on to suggest that Petitionary prayer is in the end such a submission to the will of God.¹⁸ But here is paying attention to the surface grammar and not to the depth grammar of Mark. The whole of verse 36 reads (R.S.V. text): "And he said, Abba, Father, all things are possible to thee, remove this cup from me; yet not what I will, but what thou wilt". Christ addresses God not as a being who is outside participation in human language, or who is a being we cannot understand: Christ as very man addresses God as Father, one of the most personal terms. This verse seems to presuppose that had Jesus asked for the removal of the cup, for the removal of the necessity for his passion, God could have removed it. What happened, 'how' things are, was important for God's redemption of mankind. 'How' Jesus behaved was a crucial factor in his redemptive action. This verse seems to contradict Phillips whole thesis, since the verse presupposes: a) God could have answered Christ's petition for the removal of the cup, If Christ had insisted that he did. b) The history of the 'how' of the world depended on Christ's refusal to take the easy way out, and not ask for God to deliver him from the passion. There is a strong tendency of radical theologies in both the Catholic and Protestant camps, to leave redemption to God and let the world go to the devil. This is shown clearly in Phillips view that God can never be said to act in the world. God shows himself in the fact that the world exists, not in 'how' it exists. Phillips leaves salvation to the self-negation of the individual, and ignores the importance to God of the social circumstance and obligations in which men find themselves.

Religious Dependence

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

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

But is Phillips univocal view of fact claiming statements correct? Are all fact-claiming statements some type of hypothesis? I think not. When I say 'there is a desk in my room', I am not stating an experimental hypothesis, in the way in which I would be doing if offered an analysis of the rectilinear propagation of light. I do not infer from sense data, or from any other sorts of entity that there is a desk in my room. If I do when and how do I perform the inference, why am I never aware of making such an inference?

¹⁷ Mark. 14:36

¹⁸ Phillips Op.cit. p.122

¹⁹ Op. cit . pp. 97-98

²⁰ Cf. p.2 Phillips "Wisdom's God's" Philosophical Quaterly January 1969 pp. 15

If this possibility is ruled out, is my belief that there is a desk in my room a non-experimental hypothesis? No. It is not a hypothesis in any sense of this word. If my belief about my desk is a hypothesis, then I seem to be committed to saying that all beliefs about the material world are some sort of hypothesis. But the term ‘Hypothesis’ implies:

- a) that several similar phenomena are being related in order that their common cause may be explained.
- b) That the relation of the phenomena to the common cause is inferential. The desk in my room is a particular entity. Further I do not know it as the result of an inference ... I see it. Therefore I cannot see that there is any ground for saying that my belief about desk is a hypothesis of any sort.

Does the belief that the ‘how’ of the world count against its creation by a good omnipotent God make the belief in this God an experimental hypothesis? Phillips criticizes Flew, Mitchel and Crombie for supposing that evil in the world counts against the existence of a good omnipotent God. This is not surprising since Phillips God is a logically necessary being who cannot be said to be related in any way to the contingent particulars of the world. Phillips presses his argument by using a fork technique: Belief in God is either non- cognitive, or it is an experimental hypothesis. There is room for no third alternative. Apart from assertion of his position, Phillips gives no reasons why there should not be factual beliefs about God which are not hypotheses. God, like our perception of a material object is not inferred from the nature of the world. Rather the nature of God and the nature of the world illuminate the factual content of each other.

The major defect in Phillips treatment of the possibility of cognitive belief, in his refusal to allow the possibility of informal factual beliefs as well as the formal factual hypothesis. Newman’s distinction²¹ between ‘Natural’ and ‘real’ assent is surely pertinent here. Phillips makes all cognitive beliefs ‘natural’ in the sense that he insists they must be some type of hypothesis, and, if he is consistent he must say that all beliefs about the material world are in the form of general propositions, and are formally inferential in character. Newman rightly insists that most beliefs held in ordinary life are not so formalised; they are certainly factual, cognitive beliefs, but are beliefs about particular objects and are the results of ‘direct’ perception, rather than of any formal techniques.

What Sort of Theodicy Does Phillips Use

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

²¹ The Grammar of Assent Ch. 4 pp.49

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

For Phillips theodicy must be logical impossible sort of enterprise, because he allows no logical or casual relations to exist between God and the world. The fact that problems of theodicy arise for the cognitivist he regards as reason against accepting the cognitivist position.

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

It is hard to understand what it means to say that we must thank God for everything, and accept what is, no matter what it is. Suppose that there as much more physical evil in the world than there is. Suppose that each person was so built that he was born suffering from a painful and incurable cancer, which lasted the whole of a person’s life. Around the age of seventy each person died in severe pain. The only thing men could do would be to eat and keep themselves alive. What would it mean to accept God and to thank God for the fact that the world is, in this sort of situation?

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

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

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

²³ Op. cit. p.100

²⁴ Op. cit. p. 101

²⁵ Op. cit. p.102

God for it' seems perverse. If God understands human beings in their creaturely state at all, he surely understands the appropriateness of sorrow at the loss of a loved wife or husband. Consider Jesus weeping before the raising of Lazarus, or at the thought of the future destruction of Jerusalem.

Secondly, is it true for a Christian that man is nothing? The doctrine of creation does or is sometimes thought to imply that God created man *ex nihilo*, but this does not mean that man when he is created is also nothing. Man once he is created by God is something, and has value and rights which make his act of rebellion a possibility. If man is nothing then the world and the creatures seem to have no value in their own right. The world, is a stage set for the drama of redemption in which the redemption is all that matters, and the people and creation as such are merely a means to the redemptive end. Phillips seems to disagree with the psalmist on the saying: "What is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou visitest him. Thou created him a little lower than the angels to crown him with glory and worship."²⁶

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

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

²⁶ Ps. 8 Prayer Book text

²⁷ Essays Philosophical and Theological. p. 315 ff.

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

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

Here the notion of humility is being used to cover a pernicious form of conservative aggression. It is almost a declaration of the infallibility of the method of Anglican ecclesiastical appointments. Human beings, including clergymen, are in the first instance responsible for any uncertainties and injustices which occur in Church appointments. God, however hard he tries, cannot turn injustice into justice. He may already have fitted into the purpose as unjust and never ceases to be this. Those who see the injustice for what it is, commit a sin against the Holy Ghost if they refuse to condemn it for what it is. Humility before the purported will of God is no substitute for that humility which is willing to see and condemn injustice, no matter what the cost to the person who has to do the condemning.”²⁸

Is There a Satisfactory Theodicy?

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

I do not think the problem of evil can be solved in the sense that a reason can be given for any and every occurrence of an evil. A perfect theodicy explains the reason for every evil in the world. If the phrase ‘the best of all possible worlds’ means anything,

²⁸ ‘Justice’: Reprinted in the *Borderlands of Theology* p. 148

presumably it seems that world in which possibility of evil exists, but in which there is need for a theodicy.

Phillips is correct in seeing that which has traditionally been called ‘the problem of evil’ presents one of the greatest obstacles to belief in Christian God. Philosophical discussions of this problem have been re-opened by A.G.N. Flew²⁹ and J.L. Mackie³⁰ Flew and Mackie both present a jazzed up version of Hume’s statement of the problem of evil (*Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*). Parts I and XI). The charge against theism is that the statements ‘God exists and is all god and all powerful’, and ‘evil exists in something he creates’ are logically incompatible.

“There is no view of human life or of the condition of mankind from which, without the greatest violence, we can infer the moral attributes, or learn that infinite benevolence, conjoined with infinite power and infinite wisdom, which we must discover by the eyes of faith alone.”³¹ The objection to theism is more fundamental than the objection that none of the arguments put forward to support it are invalid, or the premises false. If it can be shown that the terms of the concept involved in the conclusion are logically self contradictory, then no argument can ever support this conclusion. “God is omnipotent; God is wholly good; and yet evil exists. There seems to be some contradiction between these three propositions, so that if any two of them are true the third would be false. But at the same time all three are essential parts of most theological positions; the theologian, it seems, at once must adhere and cannot consistently adhere to all three”³² Mackie’s claim is that ‘God is omnipotent’ God is all good’ and ‘evil exists in the world’ are, if taken together, logically inconsistent, and this logical inconsistency can only be eliminated, either by denying one of the three prepositions, or by shifting the ordinary meaning of the words contained in them. I will try to show that if the terms omnipotence, goodness, and evil are analysed, the Christian concept of God can be shown to be logically self – consistent, although whether such a concept refers to an existent entity will remain an open question.

God is Omnipotent

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

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

²⁹ In ‘Divine omnipotence and human freedom’ Reprinted in *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*. Pp. 144 ff

³⁰ In ‘Evil and Omnipotence’ reprinted in Pike: *God and Evil*. pp 46ff

³¹ *Dialogues*. Pt. X N. Kemp – Smith ed. P.202

³² Op. cit. p. 47

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

I wish to argue that by saying God is omnipotent, I am saying not that God's nature and power are absolutely unlimited, but that God's nature is such that the properties he does possess, are unlimited. Donald Hudson puts forward a similar view to this in "An attempt to defend Theism" "The all- power attributed to God is invariably all power in goodness. This is a qualified sort of power, and one's conception of it will be determined by what one takes to be the highest good. Suppose one takes that to be love. Then the all power which one claims for God, will be the capacity to go on loving through all rejection and opposition. The claim will be that nothing diminishes or destroys this love. The contention will not be that God is two distinct things viz. loving and powerful, but that his love is his power."³⁴

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

God Is All Good

Mansel in *The Limits of religious thought* claimed that the fact evil occur" are reconcilable we know not how, with the infinite goodness of God, but which certainly are not to be explained on the supposition that its sole and sufficient type is to be found

³³ Pike Op. Cit. p. 50

³⁴ Philosophy: January, 1964

in the finite goodness of man.”³⁵ Mansel is saying the term ‘good’ has a different meaning when applied to God, that the meaning it has in ordinary use. In a similar way Phillips by stating that God does not participate in human language and that his will cannot be questioned by a genuine believer, but only obeyed, is saying that God in the end is not really good. J.S. Mill said that “To say that God’s goodness may be different in kind from man’s goodness, what is it but saying, with a slight change of phraseology, that God may possibly not be good?.....I will call not being good, who is not what I mean when I apply the epithet to my fellow creatures; if such a being can sentence me to hell for not so calling him to hell I will go.”³⁶ Thus to say God is good, is presumably to say that God is good in an analogous sense to the sense in which man is at the best imperfectly good.

Evil Exists in the World God Created

The problem of evil can easily be solved by denying that evil exists. This can be done by claiming that evil is only an appearance, which is not ‘real’ if the universe is viewed as a whole, but seems real when part of the universe is viewed independently of the whole. Phillips takes up a position very close to this by saying evil is the ground for metaphysical rebellion if the creator of the world is inferred from his creation, but that if we adopt a genuinely religious attitude we can meekly accept the evil that there is, and offer God thanks as much for the good things we receive, as for the evils we suffer. Is not this in the end to say that evil is not real for the religious believer? I do not see how such a position can be held by anyone who takes their experience seriously. If someone dying slowly of cancer is not an example of evil, can the words “evil” and “good” have any meaning at all?

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

The free will defence claims to explain the existence of moral evil in a world created by an omnipotent all good God, by asserting that God gave all man free will to choose between good and evil. Some men sometimes and most men occasionally choose evil rather than good, but a world containing free moral agents and some evil, is a better world than a world containing more automata, beings who always do what is right because God has so made them that they could not but perform actions which happen to be right. Mackie restates the case: “To explain why a wholly good God gave free will although it would lead to some important evils, it must be argued that it is better on the whole that men act freely, and some time err, than that they should be innocent automata acting rightly in a wholly determined way.”³⁷ This defence is sound if: (a) What G.E Moore called the theory of Organic Wholes is an acceptable theory. (b) In order to be genuinely free moral agents, some men may abuse their freedom and act immorally.

The theory of organic wholes does seem a plausible theory: there do seem to be instances of the value of a whole being greater than the value of its constituent parts. The value of the parts may be neutral, or in fact negative, but the value of the whole positive. Moore claims: “To be conscious of beautiful object is a thing of great intrinsic value; whereas the same object, if no one be conscious of it, has certainly comparatively little

³⁵ Quoted in Pike, Op. cit. p. 41

³⁶ Pike Op. cit. pp. 42 and 43

³⁷ Pike. Op. cit. p. 55-56

value, and is commonly held to have none at all.”³⁸ In the case of an organic whole, it cannot be argued that a part is of greater value than the whole: the positive value of the parts alone may be less than the positive value of the whole containing the parts of negative value. The existence of the part of negative value may be a logically necessary condition of the whole possessing the value it does possess. To quote Wisdom’s example: “It is not claimed merely that love is sometimes caused pain, but that sometimes a case of love contains pain and moral evil as an object and is thus logically dependent upon that pain. It is claimed further that sometimes such a case of love contains pain and moral evil as an object and is thus logically dependent upon that pain. It is claimed further that sometimes such a case of love is good enough as whole to compensate for the evil it contains.”³⁹ It thus seems to be a logical possibility that moral autonomy plus some evil, is better as a whole than moral theonomy plus no evil.

The Flew- Mackie attack on the free will defence consists in the assertion of the theses: the compatibility thesis and the utopia thesis. The compatibility thesis states that there is no contradiction in saying that a human action is both predictable and caused, and yet at the same time the action was performed freely by the agent. Flew “demonstrates” the existence of free acts by means of his ‘paradigm case argument’. ‘Words which have no ordinary usage such as ‘act freely,’ could have done otherwise’, are taught ostensibly by pointing to a given action which exemplifies a free act and hence unless at least one example of a free act occurs, the phrase could never have been taught ostensibly, and therefore could not have got built into ordinary language. Flew believes that the term ‘free-will’ has a referent, but what exactly is this? He asserts that a free act is not an action which is uncaused, or unpredictable, but an action which is not externally compelled or constrained. “To say that Murdo was a free to ask whichever eligible girl of his acquaintance he wanted, and that he chose to ask, was accepted by, and has now married Mairi of his own free will, is not to say that his actions and choices were uncaused or in principle unpredictable but precisely and only that being of an age to know his own mind, he did what he did and rejected the possible alternative courses of action without being under any pressure to act in this way.”⁴⁰

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

One attempt to reply to the Flew-Mackie attack which I find wholly unsatisfactory is that of John Hick in *Evil and the God of Love*. Hick grants most of the Flew – Mackie case: it is logically possible that God could create free moral agents who always freely choose to do what is morally right. He writes: “So long as we think of God’s purpose for man as Mackie does, exclusively in terms of man’s performance in relation to his fellows, as a moral agent within human agent a human society, there is no contradiction in the idea of God’s so making human beings that they will always freely act rightly.”⁴² But there is the

³⁸ Principia Ethica p.28

³⁹ “God and Evil” Mind 1935 p.14

⁴⁰ New Essays. Op. cit. pp. 149-150

⁴¹ Pike Op. cit. p. 56

⁴² Evil and the God of Love p. 310

further question about men's relationship to God. Is it logically possible for God so to make men that they will freely respond to him in love and trust? In the text of the first edition of *Evil and the God of Love*, Hick claims that it is logically impossible for God to cause man freely respond to himself in love and trust. He quotes with approval: "It is logically impossible for God to obtain your love – unforced- by- anything – outside – you and yet himself force it".⁴³ In conversation over this passage Hick once assured me that he did not really mean this was a logical impossibility he is talking about. In Flew's analysis of free-will is correct, I don't think that the Hick line will work. If in an ordinary human situation a free action is one that is caused and predictable, but not externally constrained, why is this not so in the case of my freedom before God? If a free action is an action which is caused, and yet constrained, surely God could cause his creatures freely to respond to him in love and trust, and the action of the creatures would be free, provided the causal mechanism was not some kind of external constraint. Hick ought to be consistent: he ought either to reject Flew's analysis of freedom, in the cases of both man's moral relation to his fellow men and his relation to God; or it he is going to accept Flew's analysis, he must admit that God could cause man freely to respond to himself in love and trust.

I think that the best way to handle the Flew Mackie attack is to deny their central claim outright. It is just not the case that it is logically possible that God could create free moral agents whom he caused always to act morally. Flew claims that just as young married couple's marriage was a free action, because although caused, it was not constrained, in a like manner, all men could freely act normally, and yet be caused by God so to act. Flew defined free will in terms of a certain type of causality: this leads to a necessity to distinguish different types of causes. There is a qualitative difference between (a) Cause I: an event or action which is caused, yet not constrained to happen; and (b) Cause II an event or action which is caused and constrained to happen. Compare two types of marriages. In the first two people fall in love. The man proposes to the woman. The woman thinks about it, hesitates and finally accepts. After a few months of engagement they marry. The causes of this marriage will be diverse: their love for each other; the social strata in which they live and were brought up; parental likes and dislikes. Whatever the causes however, we wish to say in a case such as this that either the man or the woman could have done otherwise at any point in the proceedings: the girl could have returned her fiancée's ring; the man could have refused to say 'I will' at the marriage service. In the second, a chap makes his girl friend pregnant, and their parents belonging to a responsible upper middle class stratum of society force the man and woman to marry, even to the point of frog-marching them to the registry office. In this case the two people were constrained to marry each other. With the internal and external family pressures they could not have done other than they did. To deny the distinction between these two cases, is to go in for a rigid determination.

The trouble is Flew wants to have his cake and eat it. God must be causally related to his creatures in the second sense, if the creatures are to be in such a situation that they cannot but to freely what are morally good actions. But if Flew wants to say that God causes his creatures always to do freely morally right action in sense one of my analysis, then this type of analysis is not strong enough to get Flew's argument working. Human beings actions are all caused in some sense, yes, and they are in some sense caused by God who is their creator. But they are caused in such a way that the human beings concerned could have chosen to act in other ways than they did, if they had wished to do

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

so. If Flew denies this in the case of God, surely he has to say in case one of the two married people, that they could have not done other than they did, but this is to slide into sense II of the notion cause. A rigid form of determinism, may be the correct analysis of our supposed free action; but this is not the analysis of our supposed free action; but this is not the analysis Flew intends to offer of the relation between Murdo and Mairi. Flew's case gains may plausibility it may have from his interchanging the two sense of 'cause' which I have outlined at any point which suits his convenience.

I am not suggesting that "whatever is freely done must be sometimes not done: the power freely to choose the good presupposes the power to choose the bad, and this requires that the bad should sometimes be chosen."⁴⁴ God could have created free moral agents who as a matter of fact always choose to do what is right. It is logically possible that man might not have fallen. Whether or not the free moral agents God has created do in fact always act morally correctly is up to the moral agents in question, and not up to God.

Ethics and Autonomy

Phillips condemns the naturalistic fallacy in religion, which is committed when God's will is defined in terms of how the world is. He is only too keen, however, to commit the naturalistic fallacy in ethics, by making the real and the true ethic consist in obedience to God's will. "God's commands cannot become of secondary importance without being abandoned"⁴⁵ Phillips makes ethical values internally related to the concept of God. The ontological proof of God requires that everything we know of God is derived from the definition of this concept, and is not arrived at from experience. He writes: "To understand then what is meant by the religious conception of duty, one must understand what it means to believe in God."⁴⁶

The Problem of Ethical Autonomy

"If 'holiness' and 'what is dear to the gods' meant exactly the same, then, since holiness was loved because it was holy, what is dear to the gods would have been loved because it was dear, and holiness would have been holy because it was loved. But.....the contrary is the case and two the things are entirely distinct. One is loveable.....When I asked what holiness was, you did not choose to show me its real nature. You could only tell me something that happens to it; and that was that it is loved by the gods: what it is in itself you have not told me yet"⁴⁷

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

⁴⁴ J.L. Mackie: Theism and Utopia. Philosophy 1961

⁴⁵ 'Moral and religious conceptions duty: an analysis.' *Religion and Understanding*. P. 197

⁴⁶ *Religion and Understanding*. Op. cit. p. 195

⁴⁷ Plato: Euthyphro 11ff. in Plato and Xenopho a Socratic Discourses Everymans Library, p. 321

God Omnipotent, but Amoral

One way out of the dilemma is to adopt what might be called a ‘naturalistic’ position. That is goodness may be identified with one of God’s properties, in a similar way to which a utilitarian might claim that goodness and pleasure are identical. It is thus possible to claim that what God wills is good because He wills it: goodness is therefore identified with what God wills. If this position is carefully stated, it can aide step what has been called the argument from trivialization. Granted that if goodness is identical with what God wills, then the question, ‘Is what God wills good?’ is reducible to the question, ‘Does God will what he wills?’ But does it follow, as for example G.E Moore would argue⁴⁸ that the question, ‘Is what God wills good?’ is therefore a pointless trivial; but there are many people, including myself, who have not realized that goodness is what God wills is true by definition, and the putting of such a question, or the assertion of an analogous statement, would be necessary to bring home such people the fact that goodness is what God wills. Further, the question, ‘Is what God wills good?, is significant in the sense that it can be used as a test or criterion of the definition ‘Goodness is what God wills’. A hard headed ‘naturalist’ theologian could claim, that what God wills is good is not strictly speaking an ethical statement, but a method of indicating what study is to go under the name of ethics.... In fact this becomes the study of what God wills, without any claim, that what God wills has any goodness beyond being what he wills. This amounts to the claim that there are no qualities over and above the will of God to which the word ‘good’ can be applied. Perhaps the term ethics might be replaced by the term ‘theodices’?

Hobbes holds that God, like a civil sovereign, has the right to treat his creatures, or subjects in any way he pleases, provided he possesses the power to do so. He was convinced of God’s irresistible power which gave him sovereignty over all men, and the unquestionable right to use them as a means to any end and chooses. He attempts to reduce moral obligation: God is pictured as a civil sovereign, but with unlimited, instead of limited power, with them to enforce his commands. For Hobbes to say what God wills is good, is to assert that God has the power to enforce any command he wills. If God decided that murder, rape and incest were good from 4 a.m. tomorrow, these actions would become good at the specified time, provided God wills that they should. But if in saying that God is good, we do not mean that Tom is good when we predicate goodness of him, do we mean anything at all? To say that whatever God wills is good, in the end amounts to saying God is not really good at all. Hobbes agrees: “for in the attributes which we give to God, we are not to consider the signification of the philosophical truth: the signification of pious intention, to do him the greatest honour we are able”⁴⁹ In one passage he writes “Our faith consisteth not in our opinion, but in our submission ... for the nature of God is incomprehensible: that is to say, we understand nothing of what he is, but only that he is.”⁵⁰

Hobbes gives scriptural support to his case, by a superficial exegesis of carefully selected passages from the Bible. In particular Romans 9:20 seems to suggest that God’s goodness must be sacrificed on the altar of omnipotence.” Who are you, a man, to answer back to God? Will what is moulded say to its moulder, ‘Why have you made me thus?’ Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for beauty, another for menial use?”

⁴⁸ In Principia Ethica

⁴⁹ Leviathan Molesworth ed. p. 354. Quoted Hobbes Richard Peters p. 246

⁵⁰ Op. cit. p.383 Quoted Richard Peters op. cit. p.250

Here Hobbes touches on without discussing, the problem of analogy. How, if at all, do the words which we employ in ordinary usage e.g. ‘good’, ‘powerful’, ‘loving’ etc. refer to and describe, properties possessed by God? Is it reasonable of Hobbes to suppose that the term ‘power’ can be analogously extended to describe God, and yet deny that the term ‘goodness’ can be so extended? Hobbes wants to wriggle out of the problem by denying that it is a genuine problem: He asserts that we cannot know what properties God possesses, but only that He exists. But if this is so, then we cannot know that God is all powerful. If, however it is meaningful to extend the usage of the word ‘powerful’ or ‘sovereign’ to describe God, why cannot the meaning of the word ‘good’ be extended in a similar way? If Hobbes appeals to the scriptures at this point, it seems that the four gospels support the view that it is necessary to attribute goodness to God. Thus “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” And Jesus said to him ‘Why do you call me good? No one is good, but God alone’⁵¹

Anyone who defines God’s goodness in terms of his will or power, cannot avoid concluding that the term ‘goodness’ can be eliminated from our description of God, because the same features of God can be equally adequately described in terms of will or power. Hence Richard Price argues: “If there were no moral distinction, eternally and unalterably right and wrong, there could be nothing meant by his eternal and unalterable rectitude or holiness ... what can be more preposterous, than to make the deity nothing but will; and to exalt this on the ruins of all his attributes.”⁵²

D.E. Phillips: God and Ought:

“Many philosophers suggest that ... an acceptance of God’s commands must depend ⁵³ on my moral judgement. I want to deny this ... What I am denying is that the relation between God and what I ought to do is necessarily parasitic on moral judgement. On the contrary, for believers ‘good’ means ‘whatever God wills’

Phillips argues that in the case of childrens obligation to their parents an ‘ought’ statement is implied by an ‘is’ statement, because he claims that from the fact X is my father I can infer that I ought to obey him. “That status of being a father entails certain rights, which children of the father have obligations to satisfy. It is possible to argue from ‘He is my Father’ to ‘I ought not to leave him destitute’”⁵⁴ Phillips continues that if one understands what it is for someone to be a Father, one will understand why he ought to be obeyed. There is something about institution of the family which bestows moral obligations on those who accept it. “This is because in rejecting God’s will, one is not rejecting one claim among many within an institution such as a family; one is rejecting the foundation of an institution. To reject God’s claim is not to reject one of many competing claims in a way of life; it is to reject a way of life as such ... Camus says: ‘When man submits God to moral judgement, he kills him in his own heart.’”⁵⁵

I find Phillips arguments very confused. Firstly, I think it is false to say from ‘X is my father’ I can infer, ‘I ought to obey X’. There are certain commands a father could give me which I ought not to obey. If my father was a professional bank robber taught me

⁵¹ Mark 10:17 R.S.V. text

⁵² A Review of the Principle question of Morals ed. D.D. Raphael pp.86-87

⁵³ Christian Ethics and Contemporary Philosophy ed. I.T. Ramsey, p.133ff

⁵⁴ Phillips Op. cit .p.136

⁵⁵ Op. cit. p. 139

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

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

Thirdly Phillips fails to see clearly that the term father may have both descriptive and prescriptive connotations. “No doubt I shall be accused by some Philosophers of having moved argument from descriptive to evaluative statements,” he admits.⁵⁶ Consider the word ‘steal’. On the descriptive level, “Thomas stole £5 from X” means “Thomas removed from X’s possession without X’s permission a £5 note which X had a right to own”. But the word ‘steal’ also has emotive, or if a less subjectivist moral theory is preferred, prescriptivist overtones. The notion of ‘ought not’ seems to be built into the notion of stealing. This does not however imply that it is possible to infer from the fact that Thomas stole £5, that Thomas ought not to have stolen £5. The circumstances of the case might be such that Thomas ought to have stolen £5, e.g. if this action was performed in a period of economic depression, and high unemployment, and it was the only way of his preventing his wife and children suffering from acute malnutrition.

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

Splendid Isolation

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

⁵⁶ Op. cit. p.135

Religion would not have the kind of importance it has were it not connected with the rest of life. Religious discourse has much in common with moral discourse....on the other hand I also want to avoid the view that religious concepts can be accounted for in moral terms.”⁵⁷

In Phillips’ philosophy, this statement is not more than a pious intention which is never put into practice. His account of ethics, for example, is so religious, that it is cut off from the will of God. But Phillips’ concept of God is itself completely isolated from ordinary discourse: it resides in its own self-justifying language game. Phillips method is similar to Winch’s insight that to follow a rule is to act in such a way that one’s action commits one to and is a sign of, commitment to some further act it portends, whose non-realisation would constitute the violation of a rule. “The notion of following a rule is logically inseparable from the notion of making a mistake. A mistake is a contravention of what is established as correct; as such, it must be recognisable as such a contravention. That is if I make a mistake in say my use of a word, other people must be able to point it out to me ... Establishing a standard is not an activity which it makes sense to ascribe to any individual in complete isolation from other individuals. For it is contact with other individuals which alone makes possible the eternal check from an established standard.”⁵⁸ Phillips and Winch thus place themselves in the Kantian tradition of fixing a great gulf between pure and practical reason which no formal logical relations can cross. The price of such a move is to create a total separation of religious statements from statements describing the world, or any aspect of it. The problem about such a deep separation is to know where in the God is placed on the conceptual map, if he has no place in and no relation to the categories of pure reason. Kant remarked in the *Grundlegung*, that although we can never comprehend freedom, we can comprehend its incomprehensibility. Insofar as Phillips is always telling us what parts of the conceptual map God does not occupy, and never the parts which he does occupy, his motto might well be that although we cannot understand God. We can understand his incomprehensibility.

Conclusion

Phillips is a theoretical theist. He claims that he believes in and prays to God. I wish to argue that because the religious language game he plays is totally cut off and isolated from all other language games, he is in practice an Atheist. It is very hard to pin Phillips down and show that this is what he finally commits himself to. This is because although he says time and time again what sort of knowledge, knowledge of God is not, it is wholly unclear what does constitute knowledge of God. God cannot be referred to by any sort of descriptive statement, he cannot be referred to by any sort of con-cognitivist discourse ... he is ‘sui generis’, so presumably any statements which are in any way related to him are ‘sui generis’. But if Phillips is not using such words as ‘true’, ‘real’, ‘genuine’, ‘being’, ‘necessary’ in some sense which is at least remotely analogous to their ordinary usage, how is he using them? What does it mean to say ‘I am praying to the true God, but my use of ‘true’ in this context is totally different from any other sort of use it has?’

⁵⁷ “Moral and religious conceptions of Duty: an analysis” *Religion and Understanding*. P.196

⁵⁸ *The idea of a social science*, p. 32

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

Phillips book is high flown idealist metaphysics: the cognitivist- non- cognitivist dispute which raises, rests on an answer to the question what metaphysical concept of God is the most adequate: Phillips answer reflects the Hegelian love for ontological argument. The concept he chooses forces him to engage on a large scale of programme of revisionary metaphysics, in which he persuasively redefines the concept of prayer in non-cognitivist terms.⁵⁹ It is easy to show that a descriptive metaphysic of the Christian concept of indicates, that Phillips is wrong, and that the Christian language is cognitive. But Phillips could admit that there is such contrary evidence, yet reply that all cognitive uses of religious language are superstitious, and are never implied by prayer to the ‘true’ God. Even if we grant that the cognitivist concept of God is not worship worthy, whatever is meant by this emotive phrase, neither is Phillips concept. This is because to be worship-worthy the concept must at least be intelligible: but I just do not understand what sort of God this is to whom nothing has any casual or logical relations, to whom nothing can be told and who cannot understand human language.

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

The New Testament preaches that God revealed himself in Jesus Christ. “And he asked them ‘But who do you say that I am’. Peter answered him ‘You are the Christ’. And he charged them to tell no one about him.”⁶⁰ Not only is there no serious discussion of Christology in *The Concept of Prayer*, but the epistemology it enunciates is logically unable to handle a God who becomes flesh. “The fact that there should be anything, that there should be a world, survives these changes as a source of prayer and in so doing remains distinct from any contemplation of objects in the world (cf. Wittgenstein: How the world is completely indifferent for what is higher. God does not reveal himself in the world. Tractatus 6.4.32) Any aspect of the world which one contemplates could become an object of human understanding and utilization. One cannot say of God, without talking nonsense, that He is an object of human understanding, or that He can be used”⁶¹

The incarnation cannot be given a place on Phillips conceptual map, because the concept of God which Phillips uses is that of a logically necessary being. Presumably the statements describing the existence of a logically necessary being are themselves logically necessary. The statements which describe the Word became flesh, the God who humbles

⁵⁹ Stevenson: Ethics and Language, 1944

⁶⁰ Mark 8:29-30

⁶¹ Op. cit. p. 76

himself to become man, if they are to describe a being that genuinely enters the historical scene, amidst its ambiguities and uncertainties, are in the nature of the case, contingent. Lessing once remarked, “If no historical truths can be demonstrated, then nothing can be demonstrated by means of historical truths. That is, accidental truths of history, can never be the proof of necessary truths of reason”⁶² Equally, necessary truths of reason cannot be the proof of accidental truths of history. By making all the relations between assertions made about of God internal Phillips has cut off the possibility of this God having any logical relations with the history of the world, with contingent particulars, of space and time. Phillips attempts what Barth condemned in those who try to get from abstract concepts of God to the particular actuality of Christ.

I admit that in his chapter on ‘God’s voice and the concept of community’ Phillips does stress the impossibility of understanding Christ’s claim to be the Messiah, except against the backgrounds and traditions of the Jewish faith. But this is an example of Phillips habit of switching when he finds it convenient, from the stronger meaning equals use theses, which makes religious language isolated and autonomous, to the weaker meaning equals used thesis, which stresses only the importance in seeing each statement in the context in which it is made, and as not cut off from its history. It is true that Jesus’ claim to be the Messiah cannot be understood apart from its context in Jewish eschatological expectations: but Christ’s claim to both fulfill and transcend and modify these expectations presupposes a logical relation between statements about Christ’s biography, and statements about the actions of God, which are ruled out by the concept of a God which is that of a logically necessary being.

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

The crucial defect in Phillips account of the logic of religious is that he assumes that it is single leveled. Once ‘depth’ grammar has revealed what logic of God is like, this univocal logic can be applied to every religious statement, and any religious statement which does not fit into this account, must be reduces to a statement which will, or be eliminated from religious discourse. Phillips uses Wittgstein’s insight that words and statements only have meaning in the stream of life, to prop up a doctrine which leads back to the dogma that to mean is to name. Just as logically proper names are entities which name one and only one thing, and have internal logical relations with any other logically proper names, so the religious language game, as it were names of God, in such a way that there is only one method of referring to God, and this one method of reference is logically unrelated to all other uses of language.

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⁶² ‘On the proof of the spirit of power’. Theological Writings ed. Henry Chadwick.

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