

## FOREWORD

IN his lecture on Hell, Ian Ramsey, the Bishop of Durham, refers to theologians who are anxious to remain in full flight and never touch down. One way of 'touching down', which Ramsey recommends, is to say how talk of 'God' – and associated talk of 'faith', 'prayer', 'sin', 'repentance', 'judgement', 'heaven', 'hell', 'eternal life' – is to be understood. 'Too often have men talked as if the way to solve theological problems was by great familiarity with God, when what was needed was a patient and thorough examination of the language being used about him.'

What does such 'a patient and thorough examination' reveal? Does it reveal, for example, that utterances like 'I believe in God the Father Almighty' belong with utterances whose function is exclusively 'performative' or 'prescriptive'? In other words, is what is peculiar to religious utterances precisely that they are 'statements which are devoid of any claim to truth and which function in a different way from statements which do lay claim to truth'? This is one of the questions N. H. G. Robinson, Professor of Systematic Theology at the University of St Andrews, asks in the first paper in this volume of the 1967–8 Royal Institute of Philosophy lectures. Is religious language 'non-truth-claiming'? Has it no 'correspondence to independent reality', no 'objective reference'? To Robinson it seems that this question, 'the issue between subjectivism and objectivism', is one that can be put quite significantly. (I am not so sure. I know what it means to call a particular empirical statement, such as 'It is raining', 'true', but this does not help me when it comes to understanding what it means to call empirical statements, in general, 'truth-claiming'; or non-empirical, grammatically similar, statements, in general, 'non-truth-claiming'. Is 'Empirical statements are truth-claiming' itself truth-claiming, or is it prescriptive, a persuasive definition of

'truth-claiming'?) Once this question, of subjectivism or objectivism, is accepted as meaningful it may seem that to avoid 'the elimination of religious *belief*' (and 'Does what is recognisably religion remain when religious belief has been eliminated?'), some way must be found of showing that religious language is, in general, truth-claiming. It is to this problem that Robinson turns in the final part of his paper, in which he propounds a solution which, he thinks, is suggested by the idea 'of encounter, of revelation and response'.

John Hick, H. G. Wood Professor of Theology at the University of Birmingham, distinguishes, in a way Robinson does not, between the question as to what faith is, phenomenologically, and the question as to whether it is 'veridical'. About the latter, he says: 'My own view is that it is as rational for the religious man to treat his experience of God as veridical as it is for him and others to treat their experience of the physical world as veridical.' If he means that one can no more have a reason for questioning religious experience in general, than one can have a reason for questioning sense perception in general (*pace* Descartes), then I would agree.

In his phenomenological account of faith, Hick draws on the same idea 'of encounter, of revelation and response' that suggests to Robinson a solution to the problem of how to show that religious language, in general, is truth-claiming. He remarks on how, whereas the Bible is 'full of men's encounters with God and men's personal dealings with the divine Thou', the dominant systems of Christian theology see faith as an assent to certain theological propositions rather than as 'a religious response to God's redemptive action in the life of Jesus of Nazareth'. This, he believes, is wrong; and in his paper he tries to show how 'the cognition of God by faith is more like perceiving something that is present before us than it is like believing a statement about some absent object'. Different people, or the same person at different times, may see what is objectively the same thing, differently. For example, a drawing of a cube can be seen as a cube viewed from below, or as one viewed from above. Hick expands this notion of 'seeing-as', to which Wittgenstein drew attention in his *Philosophical Investigations*, II xi, into that of 'experiencing-as', and then, by applying

it to events instead of objects, comes to talk of 'experiencing the events of our lives and of human history, on the one hand as purely natural events and on the other as mediating the presence and activity of God'.

He considers an objection to this expansion. 'Just as it would be impossible for one who had never seen rabbits to see anything *as* a rabbit, so it must be impossible for us who have never seen an undeniable act of God, to see an event *as* an act of God.' He thinks that the objection collapses if *all* experiencing is experiencing-as. I am not sure about this. Consider the case of the cube seen as a cube viewed from below. Could I not understand 'The cube was viewed from below' without knowing what a cube so viewed looks like? And is not understanding this a logical condition of my having the experience of seeing a cube as a cube viewed from below? Similarly, must I not first understand 'The event was an act of God' to be able to experience an event as an act of God?

This last question leads on, naturally, to another: How am I to come to understand such statements as 'The event was an act of God'? A prior question might seem to be: What is it to understand such statements?

W. D. Hudson, Senior Lecturer in Philosophy at the University of Exeter, says that one thing understanding such statements involves is seeing the logical connection between what is said and a 'picture' (e.g. 'God the Father'). But this would seem to be merely a matter of what Robinson calls the 'internal logical coherence' of the religion, and Hudson himself says that he is sure that there is far more to understanding a religion than this.

He is primarily concerned with the answers given in Wittgenstein's *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief* to three questions: (i) What training is required in order to participate in religious belief? (ii) Is it reasonable, or unreasonable, to do so? and (iii) What is the essential difference between those who do participate in it and those who do not?, and their bearing on the question: (iv) To what extent can religious belief be regarded as a logically self-contained universe of discourse? In connection with the second question he makes a revealing comment. He remarks that

Wittgenstein was right to insist on what has been called the commissive force of religious beliefs, and then adds that “‘There will be a Judgement Day’” appears to have constative force also – to assert that a certain event will, as a matter of empirical fact, occur’. I call this ‘revealing’ because it suggests that he identifies ‘having constative force’ (being ‘truth-claiming’, in Robinson’s terminology) with being, or involving, what he calls ‘an ordinary empirical assertion’. There is no need to make this identification. We can say, for example, that the truths of geometry are no less truths for not being, covertly, empirical. The idea that we *have* to choose between a view of religion as ‘merely subjective’ (a matter of ‘bliks’ or ‘onlooks’) and one of it as essentially characterised by superstitious beliefs like that of a child in Jack Frost or Santa Claus, may be attractive to the non-religious, who do not like to think that there are meanings they do not grasp, forms of life in which they do not share, but has no basis in sound philosophy.

What Paul M. van Buren, Professor of Religion at Temple University, Pennsylvania, says in the last part of his paper is very much to the point here. The choice between saying that faith and theology are non-cognitive and saying that they are so much nonsense, he says, ‘can be forced upon us only on the assumption that understanding and saying how things are are of one sort only’. He goes on:

I find that the distinction ‘cognitive/non-cognitive’ is not helpful in getting clear about how Christian faith is a matter of how the world is, and I regret having once been seduced into picking up that stone axe as an appropriate tool for opening up this delicate bit of watch-works. The issue is not, as that distinction leads us to suspect, that we have an agreed frame of reference, an agreed way of carving up the world into tables and chairs on the one hand, and our attitudes or dispositions towards tables and chairs on the other. Christian faith, on the contrary, proposes another way to do the carving up in the first place.

Perhaps the difference between van Buren (faith is, in some way, a matter of how the world is) and Hick (faith is a matter of how the world is experienced, it being a further question as to

whether that experience is veridical or illusory) on the nature of faith reflects a difference in their attitude to describing their faith in terms of 'God'. For Hick an example of faith is experiencing events 'as mediating the presence and activity of God'. Van Buren says that 'theology is that activity of men struck by the biblical story, in which they undertake to revise continually the ways in which they say how things are with their present circumstances in the light of how they read that story'; he likens the Church's attempts to capture, for all time, the significance of the biblical story in some image, or way of talking, to the attempts, reported in that story, of the chosen people to realise the promise of Jahweh in one or another of a succession of different forms; and he gives, as an example of just such an image, that of 'the eternal, unchangeable and immovable God of Augustinianism'. For van Buren, talk of God is only one way of responding to the biblical story, a way, moreover, that has had its day, to be replaced now by a language which allows us to express what we recognise 'in the story of the utterly faithful Jew of Nazareth', namely, that 'men are made for each other'. (Incidentally, I am not sure that in some talk of God – e.g. 'God is love' – this is not amply recognised.) It is easier to understand it being said of this, that it gives 'a leading in life which those who follow find, in an odd sort of way, to be right' (so that a *further* question of its being true does not arise) than it is to understand it being said of the proposition that some events 'mediate the presence and activity of God'.

I am reminded by this of something Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, in a letter dated 5 September 1943,<sup>1</sup> about 'how closely our lives are bound up with other people's, and in fact how our centre is outside of ourselves and how little we are individuals'. He went on to say that 'it is a literal fact of nature that human life extends beyond our physical existence'. I suppose van Buren would say that this is nonsense as a statement in the language of tables and chairs but could be a truth in a possible language of a theologian – and, if it was, would be something we simply found to be so. Finding it to be so, it would make no sense for us to go on to ask 'And does human life in fact extend

<sup>1</sup> *Letters and Papers from Prison*, Fontana Books, 1959, p. 27.

beyond our physical existence?' It would be like asking, when we had found, by using our senses, that there are tables and chairs in the world, 'And are there really tables and chairs, or are there only ideas in our minds?' The fact that some philosophers have asked this very question does not make it a sensible question to ask. Van Buren says: 'Christians have to remember . . . that the story by which they have been struck allows them to help free their neighbours and themselves from the tyranny of tables and chairs.'

In the language in which it makes sense to talk of how little we are individuals, perhaps it makes sense to talk of people deliberately turning their backs on what, in one sense, makes them individuals. 'I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me' (Gal. 2: 20). There is no place in the language of tables and chairs for the Christian idea of dying to the self, or, for that matter, of life as a gift of God. The latter is an idea that determines the Christian's attitude to suicide.

R. F. Holland, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Leeds, touches on the different attitudes to suicide of Schopenhauer and the Christian. He remarks that Schopenhauer condemned suicide because it is a phenomenon of strong assertion of will, and that in this he was not far distant from the Christian. He writes: 'A Christian perhaps might speak, not so much of conquering, but rather of dying to the self, and the most spiritual expression of the idea for him would be in prayer – particularly in such a prayer as "Thy will, not mine, be done".' His point, I take it, is the twofold one, that just as suicide was not what Schopenhauer would regard as self-conquest so it is not what the Christian would regard as 'dying to the self', and that 'dying to the self' is not regarded by the Christian as a case of conquest by a person's unaided efforts of his own evil will. Without the grace of God, he is powerless (Eph. 2: 8, Tit. 2: 11–14). What faith is subjectively, grace is objectively.

Schopenhauer was a pessimist. So is W. W. Bartley III, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Pittsburgh, whose

paper is entitled 'The Soul's Conquest of Evil'. What Bartley is pessimistic about is the extent to which there exists what he regards as a necessary condition of acting morally, namely, self-knowledge.

He argues, in the early part of his paper, that the sharp distinction made between religion and morality cannot stand. The argument seems to run as follows. (i) Religion involves self-awareness (he quotes, with seeming approval, Keynes, who defined 'religion' as 'one's attitude towards oneself and the ultimate'; he instances, as 'what Keynes called the "religious aspects"' of Moore's philosophy, 'the love of beauty, and the development of inward consciousness'; and he says that there is nothing 'unenlightened' about calling quests which involve heightened self-awareness 'religious'). (ii) 'Our interpretation of our external situation is subject to distortion by our failures in achieving a heightened self-awareness.' (iii) Acting morally and making moral evaluations require the interpretation referred to in (ii). Therefore, (iv) religion is essential to morality. In keeping with this approach, he treats the Christian's 'quest for what is called salvation' as one among a number of possible routes to the same end, the soul's conquest of evil.

In striking contrast to this is what Paul Ricoeur, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Paris, says. For the moralist, evil is characterised by its twofold relation to obligation and to freedom.

Religion uses another language about evil. And this language keeps itself entirely within the limits of the perimeter of the promise and under the sign of hope. First of all, this language places evil *before* God. 'Against you, against you alone have I sinned, I have done evil in your sight.' This invocation which transforms the moral confession into a confession of sin, appears, at first glance, to be an intensification in the consciousness of evil. But that is an illusion, the moralising illusion of Christianity. Situated before God, evil is installed again in the movement of the promise; the invocation is already the beginning of the restoration of a bond. . . . Repentance, essentially directed toward the future, has

already cut itself off from remorse which is a brooding reflection on the past.

Next, religious language profoundly changes the very content of the consciousness of evil. Evil in moral consciousness is essentially transgression, that is, subversion of the law; it is in this way that the majority of pious men continue to consider sin. And yet, situated before God, evil is qualitatively changed; it consists less in a transgression of a law than in a pretension of man to be master of his life. The will to live according to the law is, therefore, also an expression of evil – and even the most deadly, because the most dissimulated: worse than injustice is one's own justice. Ethical consciousness does not know this, but religious consciousness does. But this second discovery can also be expressed in terms of promise and hope.

Bartley would seem to be in disagreement, not only with Ricoeur, but also with Hick. If the soul's conquest of evil is regarded as of value only in so far as it makes possible acting morally and competently evaluating the actions of others (and there is nothing in what Bartley says to suggest an alternative view) then we have a reversal of what Hick says is suggested by his analysis of faith in terms of 'experiencing-as'. Hick says that his analysis suggests 'a view of the Christian ethic as the practical corollary of the distinctively Christian vision of the world'. In other words, the morality *follows from* the religion. For Bartley, the religion ('development of inward consciousness', etc.) seems to be *for the sake of* the morality. But perhaps the conflict is only apparent, Hick meaning one thing by religion, Bartley another. That is, perhaps for Bartley the language of religion is the language of Freud and Jung, and not the language in which there is talk of a promise, of hope and of the Kingdom of God.

I said, a little earlier, that it is easier to understand it being said of the proposition 'men are made for each other' that we can simply find it to be right, than it is to understand this being said of the proposition that some events 'mediate the presence and activity of God'. The explanation, I think, is that talk of 'mediation' implies that there is something which is not



directly accessible, something 'transcendent', and the question can then be asked 'Does the alleged transcendent being really exist?' The contemporary Death of God theology could thus be represented as a way of escape from a problem of verification. With more historical warrant, Frederick C. Copleston, Professor of the History of Philosophy at Heythrop College, sees it as the spiritual heir of Hegelianism, which in turn is a way of escape from an ontological rather than an epistemological problem.

Copleston distinguishes between a synthesis – an overcoming of the estrangement of man from God – which is *lived*, and one which is *thought*. In Christian love the synthesis is lived; in the philosophy of Christianity an attempt is made to think it. It is in trying to think it that the difficulty lies. Copleston's own view is that it is an essential characteristic of the language in which there is talk of God that the relation between the world and God cannot be adequately grasped and stated; it 'can only be dimly apprehended through the use of analogies and symbols'.

Philosophers have traditionally expressed the problem as that of stating the relation between the infinite (God) and the finite (the world, including man). In these terms, it may be argued that the infinite would not be infinite if there was something outside it, the finite; and that if the finite is set over against the infinite it is 'absolutised, with the result that the infinite becomes a superfluous hypothesis'. Hegel's solution is in terms of a theory about the infinite (the 'Absolute'), known as Absolute Idealism, according to which, Copleston says, 'the essence of the Absolute . . . is not actualised in concrete reality except in the sphere of spirit which requires the sphere of Nature as its necessary presupposition'. In such a theory, Aquinas' idea of God as a transcendent reality of such a kind that we know of him what he is not rather than what he is, can have no place.

According to Hegel, Copleston says, philosophy presents 'the truth of the fundamental unity between the finite spirit and the divine spirit [which] finds expression in the Christian religion in such doctrines as those of the historic Incarnation, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the Church, the Eucharist and

the communion of saints . . . as following from the nature of the Absolute instead of presenting it in the form of contingent propositions, depending for their truth on historic events which might or might not have occurred'. Such a programme undoubtedly has attractions for the philosophic spirit, but it has one overwhelming disadvantage, namely, 'that the fall of absolute idealism would entail the fall of Christianity'. One can understand Copleston's reluctance to tie Christianity to any particular metaphysical system, and in general, his doubts about the wisdom of trying to capture the at-one-ment of man with God in the web of a philosopher's abstract terminology, whether this includes the word 'God', or not.

Judging from what C. de Deugd, Reader in Comparative and General Literature at the University of Utrecht, says about him, Paul Tillich would seem to have much in common with Hegel. Both see the problem in terms of the infinite and the finite. Both reject the idea of God as 'a personal transcendent being "out there", over against the world and man' (Copleston on Hegel) or 'a being alongside or above other beings' (de Deugd on Tillich), and for similar reasons (Hegel: if the infinite is set over against the finite, so as to exclude it, it cannot properly be described as infinite; Tillich: if God were a being alongside or above others he would be subjected 'to the categories of finitude'). Both try to preserve the distinction between the finite and the infinite. Both may be regarded as trying to give expression in philosophical terms to a mystical experience of union or immanence. De Deugd, however, is concerned with the resemblance of Tillich to an earlier philosopher than Hegel, Spinoza. He likens Tillich's concept of 'the ground of being' to Spinoza's 'substance', and Tillich's 'power of being' to Spinoza's '*conatus*'.

In the last part of his paper de Deugd invites us to compare the way in which the philosopher of religion expresses, in his chosen terminology, the experience of the mystic, with the way in which the symbolist poet imparts a meaning other than the one his words appear to have if taken literally – a point perhaps not unrelated to what Copleston says about things which cannot be adequately grasped and stated but only dimly apprehended through the use of analogies and symbols.

Whereas for Copleston the use of analogies is a means whereby we may dimly apprehend in thought, in philosophising about Christianity, a relation which is lived, in Christianity, for Charles Hartshorne, Ashbel Smith Professor of Philosophy at the University of Texas, analogy is an essential part of a plausible philosophical theory about how we come to mean anything by talk about what we do not directly experience. This is the empiricist theory of meaning, that words have meaning by virtue of a connection with experience (Hartshorne: 'After all, human terms must acquire their meaning through human experiences'), and that when words are used for what is not directly experienced (other people's feelings, the causal action of one event on another, and so on) they are meaningful for us by virtue of an analogy which we posit between what we do experience and what we do not experience (hence, the argument from analogy for the existence of other minds, the activity theory of causation, and so on). An example of Hartshorne's use of the theory is his argument that the relation of God to the universe must be like that of a human mind to a body. God is spiritual (mental), and so the mind-body analogy is

indispensable; for only in the mind-body relation do we have an instance of mind dealing directly with physical – by which I here mean visible, tangible – reality. All other experiences of influence between mind and physical things – apart from abnormal and controversial cases of table-lifting and the like – are indirect, and operate through the mind-body relation.

Hartshorne does not mention that the empiricist theory of meaning, though plausible, has its critics. I do not think it is too much of an exaggeration to say that it is the main target in all of Wittgenstein's later works. Philosophers influenced by Wittgenstein,<sup>1</sup> of whom there are a number among the contributors to this volume, would say that a 'language-game', to be used,

<sup>1</sup> On the so-called 'Other Minds' problem reference might be made to a short paper, 'Knowledge of Other Minds', by Norman Malcolm, *The Journal of Philosophy*, vol. LV, No. 23, November 6 1958, and to the book, *Other Minds*, by John Wisdom, Oxford: Blackwell, 1952.

and so to be meaningful, does not have to be founded on a supposed language in which terms are 'connected' with 'experiences'. They would say that to employ the empiricist theory of meaning in talking about religion is to play into the hands of those who want to dismiss religion either as nonsense or as having only a behaviour-regulating function.<sup>1</sup>

Hartshorne holds the person-analogy (God is personal) to be an essential trait of religion, and hence, since 'there can be no analogy between something wholly absolute, self-sufficient, infinite, or immutable, and persons', that God cannot be any of these things. He holds in particular, that the notion that 'there is but a one-way street between worshipper and worshipped, only God being giver and only creatures receivers of value', 'if taken literally and absolutely, destroys the religious idea of God'. God takes pleasure in our welfare, and so derives benefit from us. He differs from us in that whereas we influence, and are influenced by, only a limited number of our fellows, he influences, and is influenced by, all of us. He is infinite as no one else is, but also finite as no one else is. In this he is 'dually transcendent'.

Hartshorne holds that the analogy which gives meaning to talk of immortality must be that of our living on in the memory of our friends. We are immortal in the sense that God remembers us: God 'will continue to know and cherish us no matter how long we have been dead. If we will have value in the memories of friends and admirers who survive us, much more can we have value in the consciousness of God, who endures forever, and who alone can fully appreciate all that we have been, felt, or thought.' The reasons Hartshorne gives for rejecting the more common doctrine of immortality which 'attributes to man an infinity of individual duration in the future' are (i) that his own view involves no assumptions beyond the mere belief in God, and (ii) that if we were everlasting we could not stop short of being as everlasting as God, and 'where does one stop short in posing as rival to deity?' I can understand the first of these reasons; it is a reason for looking for some other meaning for talk of 'eternal life' than that of immortality in the sense of life

<sup>1</sup> See *An Empiricist's View of the Nature of Religious Belief*, by R. B. Braithwaite, C.U.P., 1955.

continuing after death for ever (see below). But I cannot understand the second; I cannot see how rivalry can come in unless one is thinking of God in human terms.

Hartshorne refers to Martin Buber as one of a number of philosophers to whom what he calls the idea of 'dual transcendence' has occurred. I am not sure about this. I find it hard to see what can correspond, in what Buber says in the context of his distinction between the 'I-It' and the 'I-Thou' relations, about God being the one Thou who by his very nature cannot become an It, to what Hartshorne says, in terms of 'finite' and 'infinite', about God transcending us in finiteness as well as infiniteness.

H. D. Lewis, Professor of the History and Philosophy of Religion at the University of London, criticises Buber for expressing himself in a manner which might seem to involve the denial of something Lewis holds to be true. He is afraid that what Buber says about the Thou in the I-Thou situation not being viewed as an It, so that no knowledge of the other's character, needs, and so forth, enters into the I-Thou relation, may mean that the other is not recognised as other. 'It may lead to a conflation in which no one properly takes his stand in relation to the other, a merging such as we find in some forms of mysticism.' Such a 'conflation' or 'merging' would contradict what Lewis claims each person knows about himself, namely that he is 'a distinct and ultimate being'.

This seems to involve two questions, one of them about what Buber meant, the other about what is necessary for a relationship to continue as a relationship. On the first of these perhaps it is worth noting that Michael Wyschogrod, in the article on Buber in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards, Collier-Macmillan, 1967, writes: 'In contrast to much of mysticism that aims at the obliteration of the abyss between the self and the Absolute in the ecstasy of mystical union, the essence of Biblical religion, as conceived by Buber, is the dialogue between man and God in which each is the other's Thou.' Evidently Wyschogrod does not see the danger Lewis sees. I find the second question very puzzling, perhaps because I do not know what would constitute 'conflation' or 'merging' of persons.

Although many of Hartshorne's principal tenets can be traced to his unquestioning acceptance of the empiricist theory of meaning, he holds that God is 'analogous to a person' for no other reason than that 'without this analogy, religion loses an essential trait'. That God is in some way like a ruler or parent 'forms part of the very meaning of the religious term God'. Hartshorne does not argue for this; rather, he presents it as an obvious historical fact about what people have meant by 'God'. He is no more concerned to argue that, for some reason, we must *think* of God as a person, than he is concerned to argue that God *is* a person.

Peter Bertocci, Parker Bowne Professor of Philosophy at Boston University, on the other hand, is concerned to argue that God is a person. His argument, in Sections 2 and 3 of his paper, may be summarised as follows:

- (i) There is regularity in nature;
- Therefore (ii) There is something which makes nature regular;
- (iii) We can learn what the regularities in nature are;
- Therefore (iv) What makes nature regular must be like ourselves.

In this summary a great deal is left out. But enough is left in to make it evident that Bertocci, like Hartshorne and Lewis (though one would have to refer to Lewis' other works, such as *Philosophy of Religion*, English Universities Press, 1965, to realise this), sees the task of the philosopher of religion as being that of locating talk of God by reference to talk of the world. He describes his argument as a 'way of expressing the meaning of God in relation to man and Nature'.

Hudson says that the overall question that arises from Wittgenstein's lectures on religious belief is: 'To what extent can religious belief be regarded as a logically self-contained universe of discourse?' He says that the basis of some of the things Wittgenstein says 'does certainly seem to be that religious belief is logically distinct from any other universe of discourse'. I assume that by a distinction between universes of discourse Hudson means something like the distinction between the language in which we make contingent statements about actual triangles, squares, and so on, and the language of geometry.

(This assumption was the basis of my remark that utterances do not have to be empirical to be truth-claiming.) Recognition of the distinction between empirical and geometrical statements involves forgoing any attempt to ground the latter in the former. One does not, if one has seen the point of the distinction, suppose the triangles, squares, and so on, of which the geometer speaks, to be in the empirical world, but strangely invisible, or related to the visible triangles, squares, and so on, as causes to effects, or anything like that. In short, one does not try to locate the geometer's talk by reference to talk of what is in the world. Should we regard the language of religion, similarly, as logically distinct from what van Buren calls 'the language of tables and chairs'?

Some have felt the test case to be provided by religious talk about eternal life, heaven, and hell. (Wittgenstein takes the example of belief in the Last Judgement.) As it has sometimes been put, in talk of 'eternal life' does 'eternal' mean 'that always will exist', or does it mean 'not conditioned by time'? And if the latter, how are we to *think* of eternal life?

These are questions which are to the fore in the last three papers in this volume, by Ian Ramsey, the Bishop of Durham; Ninian Smart, Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Lancaster; and John Wisdom, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Oregon.

In his opening paragraph, Wisdom says that 'between those who when they speak of a way to eternal life are thinking of a life after death which endures for ever, and those who when they speak of eternal life give to their words a meaning which carries no implication as to whether there is life after death, there is a link, in that both are seeking a remedy against a sort of despair which comes not merely from the thought of death but from a disappointment with life together with the thought that it ends in death'. He contrasts despair, disappointment, depression, and misery, on the one hand, with contentment, joy, happiness, and cessation of misery, on the other, and says that those who have said 'There is a way to eternal life' have sought to combat despair 'by presenting a view of things which they regard as a truer view than any which generates despair'. Without some indication of the sort of disappointment Wisdom has in mind it

is hard to see whether he is concerned with what is meant by religious talk of eternal life. He may be thinking of the despair which afflicts the bereaved, simply because those they love are no longer with them.

Smart contrasts 'ordinary concerns and those encouraged by religion'. He writes:

Ordinary folk want to meet their loved ones in the beyond, even if they are not specially concerned with religion, worship, piety or contemplation. There is indeed often a tension between religion and ordinary hopes: ordinary hopes may be pointed towards simple continuation of life in company, but not particularly the company of God.

Perhaps what some people would call 'religion' flourishes on 'disappointment with life'. But is it the religion of the Bible? Is Christianity a religion of salvation in that sense? That it is has been questioned. Bonhoeffer, for instance, writes (27 June 1944):

Salvation means salvation from cares and need, from fears and longing, from sin and death into a better world beyond the grave. But is this really the distinctive feature of Christianity as proclaimed in the Gospels and St. Paul? I am sure it is not. The difference between the Christian hope of resurrection and a mythological hope is that the Christian hope sends a man back to his life on earth in a wholly new way which is even more sharply defined than it is in the Old Testament.

Is this 'wholly new way' one which is best thought of in terms of having a new 'view of things'? Does not this way of putting it neglect the intimate connection between the Christian's faith and his manner of living in society, his morality?

Ramsey considers three major difficulties about the concept of Hell as the place, in a life after death, of endless punishment (its moral repugnance, its logical inconsistency with other doctrines, and cosmological difficulties, particularly about its temporal location), and goes on to ask why, in view of them, anyone ever upheld the doctrine. One of the reasons he mentions is 'the permanent significance which men have often felt was attached



to moral choice, in the sense that men have believed that their social actions had some kind of abiding significance, involving God as he who abides'.<sup>1</sup> (Later, he refers to 'the permanent significance of moral behaviour and the need to see our responses to the moral demands of society as an acceptance or rejection of Christ', and 'the cosmic significance of moral decision, the view that the taking of moral decisions involves an attitude to God'.) But how does moral choice having an 'abiding significance, involving God as he who abides' provide a reason for 'the attractiveness and centrality of a doctrine of Hell'? In this way, Ramsey argues, 'Wrong-doing always seems to involve some kind of separation between the wrong-doer and the person wronged. Wrong-doing, in other words, creates some kind of gulf, and separation, between persons. Such a state of separation . . . would seem very likely to be a state leading to personal disintegration and destruction.' This separation, which otherwise would be merely a fact of our psychology, a matter for remorse, is transmuted, with the recognition of the significance of our social actions as involving God as he who abides, into something for which a fitting symbol is that of hell as a place of separation from God, and of punishment. But the recognition at the same time provides the occasion for repentance, for the restoration of the bond. (I am conflating Ricoeur and Ramsey, here.) And what of eternal life? "Eternal" is that hint, that signpost, that reminder that in talking e.g. about punishment – "eternal punishment" – we are using a model, viz. "punishment", in such a way as to aim at a revelation of God; that we are using a model by which to point to that loneliness, despair, separation, and so on, in whose agony and anguish it is the claim of the Christian Gospel that God speaks.'

What, then, of eternal life as it is conceived in the language of tables and chairs, a life after death which endures for ever and ever?

In the course of the discussion which followed his lecture Smart said that he would regard some sort of heavenly survival after death as an 'unexpected bonus'. He did not rule out the

<sup>1</sup> In Buber's I-Thou terms this would be the point, to which Lewis refers, that the relation of I to other finite Thou's involves the relation of I to the eternal Thou.

possibility. Does Ramsey rule it out? Under 'cosmological difficulties' in the doctrine of hell, he writes: 'Death would seem to be such a major spatio-temporal discontinuity, judging from what happens to the body at death, that there seems little reason to suppose that life after death is in a time series continuous with the present.'

Does he mean that if there is an everlasting life after death then it is unlikely that we enter into it immediately we die? I hardly think so. I think he is hinting at a way of accommodating, in terms of a philosophical theory about different time series, what many feel to be a natural corollary of anyone's having that life which is the knowledge of the only true God (John 17: 3), viz. that it cannot be destroyed by death. If I am right, then we have what would be his answer to our earlier question. If eternal life, if it means everlasting life, is not life in the same time series as our worldly life, then talk of eternal life is not talk in the language of tables and chairs.

But whether what is felt to be a corollary is in fact a corollary, and what can be meant by talk of different time series, are further questions – questions to which I do not know the answers.

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