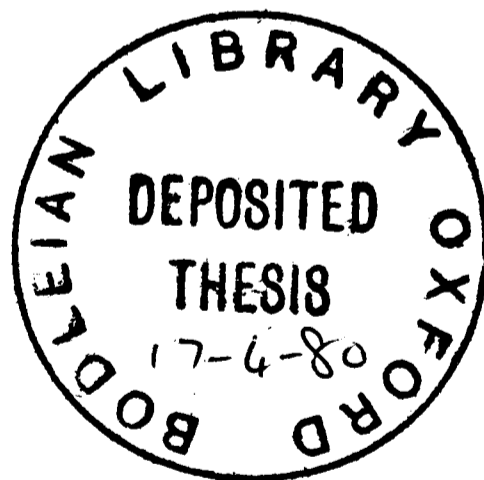


CAN GOD BE AN OBJECT OF REFERENCE?

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank all those who have taught me, especially Dr Anthony Kenny, who supervised the B.Phil thesis on which this thesis is based, and Mr Michael Dummett, who supervised this thesis.

I am also grateful to the Department of Health and Social Security for allowing me ten days special leave, and its assistance with the preparation of the thesis.

Finally I would like to thank my wife, Priscilla who encouraged me and made suggestions and syntactical corrections.

Can God Be An Object of Reference?

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Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Michaelmas 1979.

ABSTRACT

This thesis is an attempt to give a workable account of 'God', to exhibit its logical status and to show how it can be introduced into language.

The first chapter, after rejecting the view that 'God' is not a referring expression, notes the differences between various types of referring expression, and considers the objections to taking 'God' as a descriptive term, a title, and a proper name. It is concluded that 'God' is the proper name of a spirit, the objections to the other accounts being held to be decisive.

The second chapter explores the notion of a spirit. The view that all persons must be corporeal is rejected and a concept of a person is developed which shows how it is possible for persons, both corporeal and incorporeal, to be identified and individuated. Finally it is shown how it is possible to predicate emotions of incorporeal persons.

The third chapter shows how it is possible, given the nature of God, to fix the reference of 'God'. It is held that certain referring expressions have their references fixed by playing a role in such an interpretation of experience. Religious faith is shown to be such an interpretation of experience, able to fix the reference of referring expressions, because it has criteria for determining the validity of certain statements made within the interpretation. Finally it is shown how the reference of 'God' can be fixed within this interpretation.

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0. INTRODUCTION

In what follows I shall be concerned with God and 'God'. I shall have to work with a conception of God, and the one I shall use is that of Christian theism. I shall use this conception chiefly because it is the one that I believe in, and so it is the one which I know most about, and the one which holds the most interest for me. Therefore, when talking about 'God' I shall be concerned with the way that Christians use the word, and when talking about God, I shall ascribe to Him the attributes which Christians have traditionally ascribed to Him.

In the first chapter, I want to see how 'God' functions: whether as a proper name, as a referring expression of some other kind, or as a type of expression whose function is other than to make a reference. Then I want to look at a problem associated with the type of being that God is supposed to be, that is an incorporeal person. There are doubts as to whether there can be a being of this sort, centering on the fact that most of the persons with which we are familiar are corporeal. In the second chapter, therefore, I will try to show that these doubts are ill-founded. In the third chapter I will attempt to show how, given the nature of God and 'God' put forward in the first two chapters, 'God' is capable of being introduced into language.

The overall aim of this thesis is therefore to try to fix the reference of 'God'. I believe that this is an important task, and

one which has to be done in order to make sense of talk about God. In a sense, it is the fundamental problem of theology, for whilst it remains unanswered the whole of theological discourse can always be undercut by the question: 'and what is it all about?' It is then to this problem that I address myself.

1. THE LOGICAL STATUS OF 'GOD'

1.1 IS 'GOD' A REFERRING EXPRESSION

A hundred years ago, this would have seemed an odd question. But much recent work on religious language has suggested a negative answer to it, and so any analysis of 'God' now has to begin here. Some modern interpretations of religious assertions have claimed that they are not to be understood as of subject-predicate form at all, but as having a very different function. I shall look at two examples of accounts of this sort; that of Braithwaite¹, and that of Phillips².

Braithwaite analyses religious discourse in terms of resolves to lead a more "agapeistic" way of life, and stories which aid that resolve. Phillips is mainly concerned to deny that God is one being among many, but in doing so seems to deny that God is a being at all. As an example, he says

The philosopher is guilty of a deep misunderstanding if he thinks that in discussing prayer his task is to try to determine whether contact is made with God; to understand prayer is to understand what it means to talk to God³.

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1. R B Braithwaite, An Empiricist's View of the Nature of Religious Belief, in B Mitchell (ed), Philosophy of Religion, Oxford 1971 pp72-91.
 2. D Z Phillips, Concept of Prayer, London 1965.
 3. *ibid*, p 38.

His view is that the existence of God is irrelevant to the notion of prayer, or any other religious practice. Prayer is talking to God, but this bears little or no analogy to talking to another person. For example, since one can pray even if God does not exist, one can talk to God even if He does not exist.

The chief problem with these accounts is that they seem to theists to be antipathetic to religion, because they fail to reflect what theists take themselves to be saying when they talk about God; they give religious language a sense, but they give it a sense that many believers would not want to use. A theist might say "if that is what I am saying, I don't want to say it any more". Having stated this general prejudice against this sort of account, I ought to examine them to see if a case can be made out for their adoption.

The problem with Braithwaite's account is that it cannot explain why believers think that it is important to believe in God. Because if all that were at stake were the leading of an "agapeistic" way of life, there would be other, and because more explicit, more effective ways of achieving this end. If belief in God were important only because it is conducive to leading the favoured lifestyle, then the upright atheist would be every bit as good as the most perfect saint, if not better since he can manage to live correctly without the aid of fairy stories. This is, of course, a possible point of view, but it is not a theistic point of view. For the theist, the prime duty is to love God; that this will also lead to a love of one's fellow man is a consequence of this end, rather than the end in itself. Braithwaite's account is fine for an atheist, but its

failure to do any justice to the theistic way of thinking would suggest that he has left something out. And if one remembers the appalling horrors of religious intolerance it strikes one that is strange that such an ineffective way of bringing about "agape" should have lasted so long. If this account is true it makes a mockery of religion, and if generally accepted it would be the end of religion. No one could both accept this account and believe in God as distinct from wanting to lead an "agapeistic" life. It does not even come close to what theists try to mean, and take themselves to be meaning, when they talk about God. In dealing with religion we must attempt to take all religious facts into account and so we cannot just disregard the fact that belief in God is held to be of vital importance independent of its consequences.

This may work for Braithwaite, but if we try to level the same charge at Phillips he would probably reply that the fact that theists disassociate themselves from his account is of no consequence. Perhaps he would even regard such disassociation as part of the grammar of 'God'. But Phillips, unlike Braithwaite who just assumes that no propositional account is tenable, does produce an argument which is supposed to support his point of view, so we ought to consider it.

If I say that something exists, it makes sense to think of that something ceasing to exist. But religious believers do not want to say that God might cease to exist. This is not

because, as a matter of fact, they think God will exist for ever, but because it is meaningless to say that God will cease to exist⁴.

How good is this argument? Suppose we were to recast his original premise in this form: 'if I say that a thing exists, then it makes sense to think of that thing as not existing'. This seems to me to capture any truth that there might be in the initial premise without having the undue limitation produced by restricting the possibility of non-existence to the future.

The first thing to observe about this argument is that it would work quite generally for any necessary existant. It would, therefore, prevent us from saying that numbers exist, for example. But Phillips might be prepared to accept this consequence, although many others would not be. But his claim suffers from a further difficulty in that it does make sense to suppose that God does not exist, otherwise atheism and in particular religious doubt would be impossible, rather than the frequent phenomena that they in fact are. This is what explains why he needs his reference to time in the principle as he states it for his argument to work; because in order to think that God might cease to exist you would have to think both that He does now, and that He might not in the future. And

4. D Z Phillips, Religious Belief and Language Games, in Mitchell, op cit, p127. He makes a similar point in Concept of Prayer, chapter 1, but there makes extensive reference to Norman Malcolm's formulation of the ontological argument in discussing the necessary existence of God. Malcolm's argument appeared as Anselm's Ontological Arguments, Philosophical Review 69, 1960.

of course, if you believe the first of these things, you are unlikely to believe the second of them. But on this interpretation the principle lacks any plausibility; Aristotle held that the heavenly bodies could not cease to exist, and yet would not think that that prevented him from saying that they existed. The reference to time in Phillips principle stands in need of justification, and yet he offers none.

The only recourse for Phillips would be to insist that the supposition of the necessity of God's existence is enough to make assertion of His existence empty. But this would seem to have plausibility only if the sort of necessity involved is such that it is contradictory to deny that God exists. But this cannot be so with the existence of God, for if it were genuinely contradictory to deny that He existed, then atheism and doubt would be untenable positions for the ontological argument really would be valid. But as they are held, and no satisfactory formulation of the ontological argument exists, we have to admit that there can be no contradiction involved. So this move also fails, because the necessity of God's existence cannot be held to be of the sort that Phillips requires.

Alternatively, we could attack the principle itself. Why should we believe

- (1) All things which exist can begin to exist and might cease to exist?

For, while it may be true that most of the things we find had a beginning and have a foreseeable end, it would seem strange if we found something and then denied that it existed because we thought

that it had always done so and always would. This seems to me to highlight an incoherence in Phillips' reasoning. For he uses as a premise

(2) God always has existed and always will exist

to derive the conclusion

(3) It is senseless to say that God exists.

But if (3) is correct, then (2) itself becomes senseless and so cannot be used as a premise. Thus (2) and (3) together serve as a contradiction, and so we are forced to deny one of our premises. And the only available one is (1). So we ought either to reject the argument or the principle. So that Phillips' argument can provide no good reason for supposing 'God' to be non-referential.

So much for the negative aspects. Now I would like to try to give some positive reasons for saying that 'God' is a referential term. Michael Dummett⁵, in the fourth chapter of his book on Frege, offers three criteria which an expression must fulfil if it is to be a proper name, which he uses in the Fregean sense, in which it covers all referring expressions. These are

- i. the expression must be replaceable by 'something'
- ii. the question 'what sort of thing' must make sense
- and iii. the question 'which thing of that sort?' must make sense.

5. M A E Dummett, Frege, Philosophy of Language, London 1973.

Now 'God' satisfies all of these conditions in the usage of theists. 'God' in 'God is just' can be replaced by 'something'; this can be shown by the fact that God can provide, for a believer, a counter-example to the claim that no one is just. I shall consider (ii) and (iii) in more detail in a later section (1.2); suffice it say now that I think that 'spirit' is a good answer to (ii), and 'the spirit that made us' a good answer to (iii). And if the questions have answers they must make sense. At present all will remain as assertion, but I hope that the justification for these assertions will emerge as the thesis proceeds.

Perhaps the best argument for saying that 'God' is a referring expression, however, remains the fact that it has always been thought to be so throughout the long centuries of the use of the term. Which although not conclusive, at least means that we should have to have good reasons for abandoning the view. Phillips tries to provide such reasons and fails. Braithwaite offers no reasons, because he assumes that the problems which arose out of treating 'God' as referential brought out in the work done on religious language in the 1950s had shown that such a view was no longer tenable. The thinking was that since no coherent account of 'God' as a referring expression could be given, 'God' could not be a referring expression. The only way to answer this line of thought is to give a coherent account, and this cannot be done quickly. But I believe it can be done, and the remainder of the thesis will be an attempt to do it. If the attempt is successful, it will provide the best possible answer to those who believe that 'God' is not referential.

So that from now on, I shall assume that 'God' is meant to be a referring expression. The first step in our investigation will now be to consider the types and natures of referring expression.

1.2 TYPES OF REFERRING EXPRESSION

Having decided to treat 'God' as a referring expression we now need to get clear what sort of referring expression it is. For only in this way will we get a clear idea of how it functions in the language, and what conditions have to be fulfilled if God is to be a possible object of reference.

Following John Searle⁶ we may say that there are, grammatically, four types of referring expression. These are proper names; singular noun phrases, most usually definite descriptions; pronouns, in which we can include demonstratives such as 'this'; and titles. Also like Searle, I hold that titles are of little independent importance. They reduce to definite descriptions, although the attribute they employ refers to a matter of institutional fact. For this reason I shall not talk about titles in this section, although I shall return to them in 1.5.

What I really want to do here is to try to point up the logical differences between proper names and descriptions, because this is what we most require for our purposes, these being the two types to which 'God' is most commonly assigned. To this end I shall begin by making a number of observations, and then see what can be drawn out from them.

6. John Searle, Speech Acts, Cambridge 1973, p81.

First, it must be noticed that descriptions, unlike proper names, can occur predictably. Which is to say that in '-is the F' the 'is' need not be the 'is' of identity, but could be the 'is' of predication, whereas in '-is NN' the 'is' is always the 'is' of identity. Geach, following Frege, makes this point in Reference and Generality,⁷ and shows too that it can also apply sometimes where the definite description comes first, as in 'the king of France at that time was Louis XV'. When singular noun phrases have this predicative role, it is a mistake to regard them as referring expressions at all.

Linked to this point is the following one. It is possible to understand 'the F is G' without knowing which object is the F, whereas if one does not know which object is NN, then one cannot understand 'NN is G' beyond understanding it as 'something is G'. This raises the difficult problem as to what it is to understand which object an expression refers to, and this is a point which we will have to consider later.

A third difference is the possibility of making out a scope distinction in descriptions but not in proper names. Kripke, in Naming and Necessity,⁸ makes great play with the scope distinction in modal contexts, but it is equally important in the case of negation. It is an elementary point of formal logic that there is no distinction between 'it is the case that a is not F' and 'it is not the case that

7. P T Geach, Reference and Generality, New York, 1962, pp33, 48-9.

8. Saul Kripke, Naming and Necessity, in Davidson and Harman (eds), Semantics of Natural Languages, Dordrecht, Holland, 1972, pp253-355.

a is F' when 'a' is a proper name, whereas with descriptions the distinction does exist. So that when 'the a' is a description 'the a is F' is negated by 'it is not the case that the a is F', not 'the a is not F', which is the negation of 'it is not the case that the a is not F'. So, if there is a difference between internal and external negation, it is a fairly sure sign that we are not dealing with a proper name.

Fourthly there is the point that descriptions are constructed out of expressions already existing in the language, whereas proper names are expressions specifically introduced in order to refer to some particular object. It is this point that in fact makes the condition for being a possible referent of a description very different from being the possible referent of a proper name. To be the possible referent of some definite description it is necessary only to possess some property uniquely. This property can then serve as the basis for a description. But to be the referent of a proper name it is necessary that it be possible to introduce an expression to refer to the bearer. Which means that it must be possible to identify and re-identify the bearer. For if this were not possible, the expression could not be usefully introduced for the rules for its future use would not be laid down. And we cannot be said to have introduced an expression successfully if we can then go on to use it however we wish. This will mean that we will have to know what kind of thing the bearer is, for dependent on this will be the possibility of correct re-identification, since this supplies the criterion of identity. So that while the referent of 'the greatest possible being' could, epistemically at least, be a thing of a number of different sorts, 'Napoleon' could not - even epistemically for any-

one that knew the expression - be other than a man if 'man' is the relevant sortal.

Donellan⁹ draws a distinction between the "attributive" use of descriptions, in which 'the F' is to be read as something like 'whatever is the F', and the "referential" use in which fit is unimportant provided the hearer can be expected to pick out the object that the speaker is talking about. Now it would be tempting to try to link this distinction to the difference between predicative and referring uses of descriptions. The temptation exists because one thinks that if the hearer does not know which object is being talked about he has to understand the description in the way that Donellan characterises as attributive. But to yield to this temptation would be a mistake, for even in the attributive use, the role of the description is to refer rather than to predicate. The distinction is rather one of semantics and pragmatics, in that if we consider the semantic aspects of an assertion using a definite description we have to have to use the 'whatever' interpretation of the description, and it is only the pragmatic features of some special situations that gives rise to the referential use in which we, in effect, succeed in communicating something other than we say. In his example of the man believed to be drinking champagne when he is in fact drinking water, when we say that the man drinking champagne is fat, we may succeed in communicating that the man drinking water is fat, but that is not what we said. Pragmatic devices can allow us to communicate something precise by saying something vague or even plain wrong, but this

9. Keith Donellan, Reference and Definite Descriptions, *Philosophical Review* 75, 1966.

has no bearing on the logic of the expressions which we can so employ, for that is rather a matter of semantics.

Having said all this, we may now ask how we are to regard assertions using descriptions whose referent is unknown by the hearer. If I am told that the F is G I do not know who the F is, what do I understand? The options seem to be these: either I can take it as

- (1) An object is both uniquely F and also G
- or (2) An object is uniquely F, and that object is G
- or (3) Whatever is uniquely F is G.

In (1), the occurrence of the description is predicative, in (2) it appears first as predicative, but then functions referentially in the second conjunct, the demonstrative pointing us forward whatever is the referent of the discipline, and in (3) it is referential. This means that whilst 'and which object is that?' is a valid question when asked about (2) or (3), it is an inappropriate response to (1). Which in turn means that if the speaker is himself ignorant as to the referent of 'the F', (1) is the correct interpretation, but otherwise (2) or (3) would be right, since the speaker has the knowledge which makes these interpretations possible. This may be taken as showing that it is a speaker's knowledge that is crucial in determining whether a particular assertion can be interpreted as an act of reference or not; for it to be so taken it is essential that the speaker know which object he is talking about. And this is the notion that we must now attempt to clarify. For since it is this knowledge which is involved in the understanding of a proper name, and in referring with a description, it is right at the heart of the matter.

If we concentrate on the sort of explanation that is usually given in ordinary speech situations we might say that all that was needed was the ability to give some non-synonymous and co-referential expression. For this is the standard response to the question 'and which object is that?'. But we are in danger of being driven around in a circle here. For the question can be re-iterated each time the new expression is offered, when our range of co-referential expressions is exhausted we will have no alternative but to answer by using one already given. So that this will not do, for all we will have done is indicate that a number of garments hang upon the same peg, which is not to say which peg they hang upon. So that we need a way of cutting through this circle of questions. Again one might think that proper names provided a means of doing this. For there the question 'and which object is that?' changes its force; the information requested here is about the meaning of the expression rather than a matter of fact. And it might be held that the speaker could understand the expression without knowing how to explain it, and so is under no obligation to answer here. This is true, but it evades the point rather than answering it. For it would seem absurd to suggest that the speaker could understand the name if no explanation of the meaning of the name could be given, even if not by him. So that the question is in order, for it does have an answer, and the circle proceeds. So, how are we to break the circle?

The question has become one as to what it is to understand a proper name. So how do we test to see whether a person understands a proper name? Well, if a person can pick out the bearer of the name in the sense of recognising him when he meets him, and being able to search for him if he has to, then he understands the name. This is a

sufficient condition, but an unnecessary one. For if it were necessary it would mean that no one could understand names of objects which have ceased to be available for such treatment. And moreover we can be said to understand names whose bearers we couldn't recognise. ('Willard van Orman Quine' is an example in my case.) Which means we either have to admit that our understanding of such names is at best partial, or offer another sufficient condition. Actual practice would suggest that this can be done by the use of descriptions, for that is how we actually show our understanding of a name. But will this not get the old circle going again? Perhaps this might offer an escape. Offering the descriptions is not, in itself, enough; we have to adopt a particular attitude to the descriptions, and their relation to the name. What we cannot do is regard the descriptions as being equivalent to the name. For then we would come to wrong conclusions about the modal statements that Kripke makes such play with. Nor can we even regard the name as equivalent to an "alpha-transform", to adopt Plantinga's¹⁰ convenient phrase, of the description. For we have always to admit that we could be wrong and the description might not apply to the bearer of the name, even in the actual world. Such an error of fact would not vitiate the understanding of the name. So it would seem that what we do when we justify a claim to understand a name is to advance a description which we know to be contingently co-referential with the name. But again we have not broken the circle.

10. Alpha is the actual world and an alpha transform of a description is obtained by indexing the property concerned to alpha. Thus the alpha-transform of 'the F' is 'the F-in-alpha'.

But here an interesting point arises. There will be a large number of descriptions contingently co-referential with the name, so how many of them do we need to know before we can be said to understand the name? Kripke says that a speaker may succeed in referring to Feynmann, even if he knows no more about him than that he is a famous scientist. Now this might seem paradoxical, in that here he cannot be said to know who he is talking about since he has no means of distinguishing Feynmann from Gell-Mann. Now this highlights an important point. Whether someone can be said to understand a sentence containing a proper name will not depend on his knowledge of the proper name alone, for a certain knowledge may be enough for understanding in some contexts, but not in all. This might seem to show that we can understand a name without knowing which object is being referred to. But I think that this would be the wrong move. Sometimes all we may need to understand the point someone is making in using a proper name is to know some indefinite description which applies to the referent of that name, but we will still not have understood what he said. Again the point is confined to pragmatics, and boils down to the fact that we can sometimes grasp the point of an utterance without fully understanding it. An Englishman can hear a Frenchman say 'Merde!' and well understand the point from the context without understanding the expression.

But we might ask, how it is possible that all the descriptions be associated with the name as contingently co-referential? If, as seems to be the case, no description or weighted aggregate of descriptions is non-contingently tied to the name, how is the object to be picked out? The answer seems to be as follows. Originally the object was picked out in such a way as to avoid the need for

descriptions at all. This is what in fact happens when a name is introduced by baptism; here the object is not picked out by a description, but by a demonstrative. And if a description is offered to elucidate the demonstration, it picks the object out in a pragmatic way, and so establishes no logical connection between the name and the description. If this is right, then it means that if a name is to refer to an object, then it must, at one time, namely at the time at which the name was introduced, have been possible to refer to it by means of a demonstrative.

But now the question arises; what of names which are not introduced by a conventional baptism involving a confrontation but by some other means. One example would be 'Jack the Ripper', where the name was introduced in order to refer to whoever satisfied a particular description, namely 'The knife murderer responsible for the killings of the five Whitechapel prostitutes'. Here the question we need to answer is the precise nature of the connection between the name and the description. This is best, I think, handled through a consideration of the following example.

Suppose a man was charged with the murders. It would then be that he would be the referent of 'Jack the Ripper'. But suppose he was later found to be innocent of some or all of the murders. Would it then be that he was not Jack the Ripper at all? Or would the following headline make sense - 'Jack the Ripper Innocent'? The real trouble here is that there does not seem to be a definite answer to this. For, it would make perfect sense for the man to deny indignantly that he was Jack the Ripper, and yet the headline would

also be fully comprehensible to all who read it. If I had to come down on one side or the other I would say that the man was not Jack the Ripper if he had not committed the murders, but I would be disinclined to insist on the point.

Similar questions arise when we look at the behaviour of the name in modal contexts. Suppose we say that the Duke of Clarence might have been Jack the Ripper. Is this supposed to represent an epistemic 'might', or a metaphysical 'might', in that it would have been logically possible for him to have fitted the description? Or, put another way for those who like possible worlds; suppose that in W the Duke of Clarence did commit the murders, would the Duke be Jack the Ripper in W? Of course, were W the actual world, there is no question but that the Duke would have been the Ripper, but what about when W is distinct from the actual world? If the answer to this question is yes, then we could see the name as acting simply like an abbreviation for the description, but if the answer is no, the matter is not settled. For then it might act like a proper name, or like an abbreviation of the alpha-transform of the description.

But what about its behaviour with respect to negation? That is can we make out a difference between internal and external negation for sentences containing 'Jack the Ripper'? That is, is there a difference between

- (1) It is not the case that Jack the Ripper is tall.
- and (2) It is the case that Jack the Ripper is not tall?

As things stand, I think it is pretty clear that there is. For someone who believed that the murders were not all committed by the same

man would be inclined to assent to (1) and deny (2). Because, and this is an important point, it is unnecessary to know which man is the referent of 'Jack the Ripper' in order to understand the expression. All that is needed is a knowledge of the associated description. But what if we have the slightly different situation where a name was introduced by means of a description, but when the referent is subsequently located. Suppose the Ripper had been found; would it then have been the case that a knowledge of the introducing description would have sufficed for a full understanding of the name? I think not; if the information as to who the referent of the expression is available, then this has to be known if the expression is to be understood. So that whilst it is the case that the expression functions as an abbreviation for the introducing description (or its alpha-transform, it is not really crucial which), this is only because the Ripper was never caught. Had he been so, then the expression would have come to function like a proper name.

Such expressions are, then, potentially proper names, becoming proper names when the demonstration of their referent becomes known to be possible. If, however, no confrontation is ever possible, as, for example, in the case of 'the tallest man who could possibly live', a name introduced to refer to the bearer of such an attribute can never be more than an abbreviated description. We find what are perhaps the best examples of this when we introduce an expression to refer to the 'bearer' of an attribute we believe not to be exemplified. 'Baal' and 'Father Christmas' might be two examples.

So that these expressions are not really to be classed as descriptions, although they function like them, or as proper names although

they can come to function like them. Rather they should be regarded as potential proper names, which require only that the demonstration condition be fulfilled for them to become so. So that we have reached this situation: in order to get a proper name we have to break the circle of descriptions, for although descriptions will be the way in which we manifest our knowledge of which object is being talked about, they can never constitute it, for they cannot ensure that we will get off the co-referential merry-go-round. This can only be done by the knowledge that a demonstrative was or is available. Which gives us this conclusion; that we can only get a proper name if there is or was the possibility of a confrontation with the referent; otherwise only descriptive reference will be possible. (With the qualification that where confrontation may in the future become possible we have a potential proper name.)

Having clarified this difference in the conditions that must be satisfied if the various types of referring expression are to be able to refer, we can now go on to see how 'God' works, so that we can see the conditions that a being has to be able to fulfil if it is to be the possible referent of 'God'.

1.3 What sort of referring expression is 'God'?

Bearing the last section in mind, it would seem that there are three main candidates for the type of expression we should assign 'God' to. Since it is clearly not constructed out of pre-existent expressions it would seem that it is a proper name, a title, or an abbreviated description. Within the last case we would distinguish two positions according as to whether it was held that God might be confrontable in the future, or whether confrontation was out of the question. I would say that the latter was the more traditional view, although John Hick who seems to tie the meaning of religious utterances to some post mortem confrontation¹¹ might provide an example of the former. But which of the three is it supposed to be?

The first point is that 'God' designates rigidly. That is,

(I) God might not have been God

cannot be read so that it is true, excluding cases where God fails to exist. This would provide a good reason for supposing that 'God' is not a title, since titles are non-rigid designators. Whether it would also provide a reason against 'God' being an abbreviated description, would depend on whether terms abbreviating descriptions are supposed to abbreviate alpha-transformed descriptions or not, so since alpha-transformed descriptions are rigid designations, an observation like (1) is of less help than one might have hoped.

11. John Hick, Faith and Knowledge, London 1967, chapter 8.

Neither will the syntactic considerations which have often proved the main attraction of taking 'God' to be a proper name suffice to settle the issue. For while, as Pike says,

The Statements 'God spoke to Moses' and 'God, have mercy on my soul', have the syntactical flavour of statements such as 'George spoke to Helen' and 'George, please don't call me names',¹²

this is of no help, for the same is true of statements containing titles and abbreviated descriptions.

All of this means that there is not going to be a quick answer to the question as to what sort of referring expression 'God' is. We shall have to consider in detail the pros and cons of each of the competing answers. In fact, this will be more of a consideration of the cons, for the pros in each case are much the same, namely the sort of considerations I have just mentioned, chiefly the similarity in syntactical behaviour. What I shall do then, is consider the objections that might be levelled at each of the answers; if in one case the objections can be met, and in the other two they cannot, as we should expect to be the case if 'God' genuinely fell into one of the three categories, then the question will be answered. So then, I shall consider each answer in turn, first descriptions, second titles, and thirdly proper names.

Nelson Pike, God and Timelessness, London 1970, p29.

1.4 'God' as a description.

It is sometimes said that 'God' is to be understood as a descriptive term. We ought to begin by distinguishing three things that could be meant by this claim. First it could be intended that 'God' was simply an abbreviation for some description or other, so that it functioned exactly as a description does. Second it could be held that while 'God' was not equivalent in meaning to any description, its meaning was fixed by descriptive reference to an entity. This would give rise to two positions, according as to whether the description was held to fix the reference in each possible world, which would allow the possibility of 'God's' being a non-rigid designator, or simply to fix the reference in the actual world. The third position is the weakest since it is entailed by the other two but does not entail them. Therefore I shall concentrate on this third position, since if I can show that it is false, then the other two positions fall as well, since they would have been shown to have at least one false consequence, as it will have been shown that there is at least one possible world, namely the actual world, in which 'God' need not denote what is referred to by a particular description.

The general strategy will be as follows. Anyone who wishes to hold that 'God' is a descriptive term will have to specify some description which will fix the reference of 'God'. Thus he will have to hold that 'God' refers to whatever is the F in the actual world, and must hold that the connection is not just accidental. It will do no good to get the situation where God just happens to be the F in the actual world. For Joe Doakes may just happen to be the tallest man

in Oxford, but it is impossible to hold for that reason that 'Joe Doakes' has this descriptive content built into it which enables us to fix the reference of 'Joe Doakes' by saying that it refers to whatever is the tallest man in Oxford. In general, if NN just happens to be the F, we can only discover that NN is the F after we have fixed the reference of 'NN'. So that we are to suppose that there is an actual incoherence between

(1) God exists

(2) There is a unique F, (in the actual world)

and (3) God is not the unique F in the actual world

in order to uphold even the weakest of the three descriptions positions. All of which means that unless it is impossible for someone to believe (1)-(3) for some F, without equivocating on 'God', the descriptions claim has to be wrong, for there will be no description which has a sufficiently close connection with 'God'. My argument will now proceed by cases, as I consider a number of the more likely and more often proposed candidates for the role of 'The F'.

As another preliminary, I should say that it is evident that not any predicate true of God can do as an 'F'. For if this were so, heresy would be impossible. For if (1)-(3) are genuinely incoherent then anyone who believes (2) and (3) cannot believe (1), so that false opinion about God would be impossible. But on the contrary, heresy is thought to be possible, and many of the writings of the early Church Fathers are devoted to correcting false beliefs of the sort schematised by (1)-(3). So that the descriptions account is

committed to holding that there is at least one thing that cannot be the subject of a heresy, because to hold it would be, eo ipso, not to believe in God.

With all this in mind, I now proceed from the general to the particular.

(a) 'the creator of the world'.

I want to look at this suggestion in some detail for two reasons. First because the most important proofs, or attempts at proof, of the existence of God have proceeded by way of proving that there is a creator and then blithely assuming that this is God, and because a recent paper (Robin Attfield, 'The Lord is God: there is no Other', Religious Studies, 13) has made what boils down to this suggestion.

First it should be noted that this particular belief has been the subject of a notable heresy, namely the Gnostic heresy, propounded most famously by Valentinius. The Gnostics drew a characteristic distinction between the Demiurge and the supreme divine being. It was the Demiurge who through some mischance or fall among the aeons was the immediate source of creation and ruled the world, which was therefore imperfect and antagonistic to what is truly spiritual. Gnosticism thus provides a kind of radical theodicy; because the perfectly benevolent being who is God could not have created the world as it is, it must be that some other being created the world. Now, if the version of the descriptions claim at present under consideration is to be correct, Gnosticism has to be shown as not merely false but incoherent.

Aquinas concludes his first way in the Summa Theologica with

Therefore it is necessary to arrive at a first mover put in motion by no other; and this everyone understands to be God.¹³

Now the Gnostics did not hold that the Demiurge was the first mover, but rather that the first mover was not the creator of the world. But that Aquinas leaves no room for such a distinction is shown by the conclusion to his fifth way.

Therefore some intelligent being exists by whom all natural things are directed towards their end; and this being we call God.¹⁴

Except that here all men cannot include the Gnostics, since they called the director of the world 'the Demiurge'. It seems to me that the arguments of Aquinas are designed only to establish (2). Even if we grant that his arguments are valid, he is entitled to infer (1) only by assuming the further premise

(4) None other than God can be the unique F. (Where 'F' is the description he believes he has proved must have a referent).

But to assume (4) is tantamount to an assumption of the descriptions account of 'God'. Which all goes to show that the method of proving

13. St Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, literally translated by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 2nd edition, London 1920, Ia q2 a3 corp.

14. *ibid.*

God's existence exemplified by Aquinas relies on a descriptions type account, but offers no argument for it. But the reception accorded to proofs of this sort does offer evidence against the descriptions account, since the assumption of (4) has been challenged, by theists as well as non-theists. The question as to whether the God proved by philosophy is the God known by faith has troubled believers more than unbelievers. Which goes to show that while Aquinas might have succeeded in showing that there is a first mover, he has shown that there is God only if he has shown that only God could be the first mover. This is by no means obvious; the identification would be resisted by Aristotle, from whom St Thomas derived his arguments. What we need then is an argument for (4).

Robin Attfield provides one, so we ought next to look at this. It may be schematised as follows:

- (5) Only an omnipotent being could have created the world
 - (6) God is an omnipotent being
 - (7) There cannot be more than one omnipotent being
- so (8) Only God could have created the world.

Now then, suppose we grant the truth of (6) for the sake of argument, leaving aside the status of the claim it makes. Does this argument work? I would suggest not; (5) seems to me certainly false, and I am inclined to reject (7) as well.

Attfield does, however, argue for both (5) and (7). Concerning (5) he says

Only something omnipotent could bring it about that there is matter instead of none, and give matter the forms it has instead¹⁵ of the infinity of alternative possible forms it might have had.

My problem with this is that I do not see how it improves on the bare assertion of (5). If we grant

(9) Matter has the form it does

(10) Matter was given this form by someone, namely the creator

and (11) Matter could have had other forms

all of which are latent within Attfield's remark, I do not see how we can from this conclude to

(12) The creator could have given matter forms other than it has.

On the contrary,

(13) The creator could only have given matter the form it has

seems consistent with (9)-(11), and as much as we are entitled to conclude from them. Hume's remark that

If the cause be known only by the effect, we ought never to ascribe to the cause any qualities beyond what are precisely requisite to produce the effect.¹⁶

15. Robin Attfield, The Lord is God: There is No Other, Religious Studies 13, 1977, pp73-84, p74.

16. David Hume, Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals, 3rd edition, revised by P H Nidditch, Oxford 1975, I xi, p136.

seems very much to the point here. We may know that God is omnipotent and that God is the creator of the world, and so know from this that the creator of the world is omnipotent, but we cannot know that the creator of the world is omnipotent, solely in virtue of his having created the world. So that we cannot take (5) as established by this argument.

For (7) he offers the following argument.

were there more than one omnipotent individual of any sort whatsoever, they would have unlimited power over each other including the ability to unlimitedly frustrate the operation of each other's power....this is impossible.¹⁷

But this argument proves too much. For the 'unlimitedly' here is idle, and we could recast the argument in the following way: if there were an omnipotent being and another potent being then the potent being would have the power to frustrate, albeit in a limited way, the operation of the power of the omnipotent being. Since this is impossible if there is an omnipotent being, there can be no other being that is in any way potent. Which would seem to suggest, given theistic opinion on free will, that there is something wrong with the original argument. Attfield seems to take

(14) X can do A

as entailing

17. Attfield, op cit., p77

(15) No one can prevent X from doing A,

for it is (15) that enables him to get his contradiction on the supposition that there are two omnipotent beings. But do we have to admit the move from (14) to (15)? I would suggest not; the following would provide a counter-example.

(16) I can move my arm and scratch my nose

is true, whilst

(17) No one can stop me moving my arm and scratching my nose

is false, since any sufficiently powerful person could prevent me by administering a full nelson on me. But Attfield would have this comeback. He could say that (15) follows not directly from (14), but from (14) and

(18) X is omnipotent.

The reason why this might be thought to make a difference is that the reason we cannot infer from (16) to (17) is that circumstances might be adverse. But if X is omnipotent he can order circumstances to his will, and so they cannot be adverse. But this move will not work either; for the ordering of circumstances is itself an act, and so all that happens is we move one step further back. Which means that we simply get a regress, and at each stage an omnipotent being could frustrate the other's action.

All of which would tend to lead to the following sort of analysis of omnipotence. A being is omnipotent if he can initiate any change whatsoever, given the absence of adverse circumstances. This looks as if it might be absurd, making omnipotence a rather limited notion, but I do not think it is. For if we are to be able to say that one agent can bring it about that A and another bring it about that not-A, then the capacities cannot be unconditional. And whilst if there were one omnipotent being his capacities would, in practice, be unconditional, this is not a logical matter. For if there were two beings of equal and omnipotent power, their capacities would have to be conditional on the other's permitting their exercise. Thus, I would be inclined to reject (7) as well as (5). But I would not insist on this: omnipotence is an obscure notion and it could be that an account of it might be given which could save (7). But since (5) is false, this is enough to allow us to reject Attfield's argument.

Therefore, I see no reason from Attfield's argument to reject the epistemological possibility of

(19) The Demiurge, who is not God, created the world

and belief in (19) would render (1)-(3) consistent. Which means that the reference of 'God' cannot be fixed, even in the weakest sense, by having the descriptive content of 'the creator of the world'.

But not it might be objected that (19) is epistemologically impossible for another reason. This is that the Demiurge was

supposed to have been created by God, and the Demiurge is itself a part of the world. So that whilst the Demiurge may have been supposed to have created the greater part of the world, it cannot be supposed to be the creator of the world because the original part of the world, namely the Demiurge itself, was created by God. I am unsure whether the contention that the Demiurge should be regarded as a part of the world is correct; the demarcation between what is and what is not a part of the world is not entirely clear to me. But this objection can be met by a second line of thought, one which may in fact lead to a better argument against the fixing of the reference of 'God' by means of 'the creator of the world'.

This argument turns on the notion of creation itself. I want to say that if the world was created, then it must have had a beginning in time. If we regard the world as having existed eternally it seems to me to make no sense to suppose that it was created. God is traditionally supposed to be both the creator of the world and the sustainer of the world; if the world has always existed, then God has always sustained it, but His role as Creator vanishes, becomes redundant, unless we can reduce sustaining to creating. This could only be done if we were to see the preservation of the world as a process of continual annihilation and re-creation. So that the things of the world have only a momentary existence and have to be re-created at every instant. But this is an unhappy way of looking at the matter. For things cannot exist discontinuously; once a thing has ceased to be, it cannot begin to be again, although an exact replica can be made. So that if preservation were like this, we would not have a situation in which one world is constantly re-created, but a system of momentary worlds. But this would not be

sustaining the world at all; for the world would be ceasing to be from moment to moment. So that I would reject the attempt to reduce preservation to creation.

But why should creation entail a beginning in time? Because to be created in the sense under discussion, something has to be produced from nothing. Which means that we have to have a situation in which there is nothing preceding a situation where there is something. So that the something has to have a beginning.

But Aquinas insists that there can be no proof that the world had a beginning. He says

By faith alone do we hold, and by no demonstration can it be proved that the world did not always exist. (I 46 II corp)

This, taken together with the above, shows that, if we think Aquinas' arguments are sound, it is epistemically possible that the world has no creator, in that it is impossible that there should be a demonstration that it has one. But, according to Aquinas, and to many other theists throughout history, it has been possible to give a demonstration that God exists. So that 'God' cannot be taken as meaning 'the creator of the world', for if it were there would be a demonstration that there was a creator of the world, and hence a demonstration that the world had a beginning in time.

This, then, provides a second ~~argument~~ and possibly more powerful, ~~argument~~, against taking 'God' as having its reference fixed by this description.

(b) 'the supreme being'

This looks like a promising try for the descriptions account. For it does look as if it would be a little absurd to admit that God exists and yet claim that there was one greater than He. So it provides a sharp challenge which I shall have to meet.

I want to begin by distinguishing two versions of the claim, according as to whether what is intended is the being who is, as a matter of fact, supreme, or the being than whom it is not logically possible that there could be a greater. I shall look at this second notion first, because it appears to be the more popular version of the claim, and can be traced back at least as far as St. Anselm, who contended that God was that than which nothing greater can be thought.

But why should this be? First it must be granted that there have been Christians who have denied that God is omnipotent. Deeply affected by the problem of evil, they have seen no way out of the problem other than to deny that God is capable of eradicating evil, and so denying that He is omnipotent. John Stuart Mill was in this position. But if God is less than omnipotent, a greater than he is conceivable. Which would mean that we would need an argument to show why theists of this turn of mind are wrong.

Findlay (Can God's Existence Be Disproved?) suggests an argument which might be used here. He claims that it is necessary that God

be an adequate object of worship, and that it is wholly anomalous to worship anything that is limited in any thinkable manner. From which it would follow that anything less than the logically supreme being would be less than an adequate object of worship, and so not God.

His reasoning is as follows

all limited superiorities are tainted with an obvious relativity, and can be dwarfed in thought by still mightier superiorities, in which process of being dwarfed they lose all claim on our worshipful attitudes.¹⁸

Which means that we need to consider the concept of worship, to see whether this claim stands. If we follow Aquinas, we will distinguish latria, the worship due to God, from dulia, the honour due to saints and temporal rulers, by saying that the former consists not only of the honour and adoration associated with the latter, but of sacrifice as well. But not of any sacrifice whatsoever, otherwise we would pay latria to our temporal rulers when we pay them taxes. This is where we have to recall the text 'render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things which are God's'. For sacrifice may be of three things, possessions, the body, or the soul, and while others might have rights over the first two and so be deserving of their sacrifice, only God has rights over the soul. So that latria would seem to be distinguished by the sacrifice of the soul. Which means that the adequate object of worship is that to which we owe the sacrifice of our soul.

18. J. Findlay, Can God's Existence Be Disproved?, in Flew and MacIntyre (eds) New Essays in Philosophical Theology, London 1955, pp47-75, p51.

Now, why do we owe our souls to God? Because God is our creator. Since our life, and hence our soul, is a gift from God, it can properly be said to be a thing which is God's, and so God has the requisite rights over it which make it proper to sacrifice it to Him¹⁹. All of which shows that God deserves latria because He gave us our souls.

Which means that Findlay is barking up completely the wrong tree. For what should give rise to the attitude of worship is not awe at the undwarfable magnitude of God's superiority, but gratitude for His gift of life to us. And because we need not suppose the giver of our souls to be the greatest conceivable being, although as a fact we generally do, we need not suppose that a being who was not the greatest conceivable would be, because of that, an inadequate object of worship. Thus Findlay's argument falls. Which means that we cannot convict those Christians who deny the omnipotence of God of disbelief in God or of logical inconsistency. At the worst they are heretics.

Now we must consider the second view, that God is contingently the supreme being. Now this looks like the more promising try, since it seems implausible that anyone would hold that God existed and yet was not the greatest being that there in fact was, at least. So let us examine the notion.

19. Interestingly, one of the Gnostic heresies, that of the Bogomiles, whilst denying that God created the world, insists that He created the souls of human beings.

A first try at driving in a wedge between these two notions might be this. If someone were to abandon belief in God, they would not thereby abandon belief in the existence of the contingently supreme being, but rather change their mind as to what the contingently supreme being was. And thereafter they might use the term 'God' meaningfully and yet deny that it referred to the supreme being, or indeed that it referred at all. Also this description could not be used to explain the term 'God' to anyone who did not have a belief in God already. For they might well think that the supreme being was spatio-temporal, and so if told that God was the supreme being would conclude wrongly that God was spatio-temporal. Which would show that they did not understand 'God' and that 'God' had not been explained to them. But these considerations do not get to the heart of the matter, for as explained at the start of this section, what is really needed is someone who believes (1)-(3), and so atheists are of no real help to us.

Which means that we must try a different tack. Consider a heresy of the absolute dualism sort, like that of the Albigenses. They saw the world as the theatre of conflict of a power of good, God, and a power of evil, Satan, with neither able to overcome the other. Now, in what sense can God be regarded as supreme in this situation? I would suggest that it is because God is good rather than evil. But why should this make God rather than Satan supreme? Because the concept of supreme being is not independent of God, but rather the yardstick of supremacy is given by God. Thus it is more perfect to be good rather than evil because God is good, and God determines the standards of perfection. In short I am suggesting that we cannot use the description 'the supreme being' to fix the reference of 'God',

because it is the fixing of the reference of 'God' which determines which being is supreme.

The question resolves itself to this one about theological ethics:

'Is the Good good because God wills it, or does God will the Good because it is good?'. The answer is controversial, but I agree with Wittgenstein in saying that the former is the deeper conception²⁰.

After all, this is how Christians do reason morally. Christ is taken as the paradigm of a good man, not because he was perfectly good according to our preconceptions of good - this cannot be since the life of Christ has altered our views on what is right conduct - but rather because, as God, he sets the standards for what is good. That Christ followed or recommended a line of conduct is for a Christian a sufficient reason for saying that that line of conduct is right. Its goodness is justified by reference to God's will, not to some independent canon of goodness. Thus the reason that the Albigenses hold God to be supreme over Satan is not because he is good and Satan evil, but rather because he sets the standards of supremacy and is therefore good and Satan evil.

Perhaps this is even more clear with the other "perfections" of God. I can see no argument which would establish that it is more perfect to be immutable/impassive/timeless than otherwise besides that it is God that is these things.

20. L.Wittgenstein, Wittgenstein's Lecture on Ethics, Philosophical Review 74, 1965, p15.

Which means that I am unhappy with the notion of supreme being until we have got a grip on the notion of God. For it is only through an understanding of God that we can come to realise what counts as supremacy in a being.

All of which would mean that whilst if we take 'the supreme being' as our description (1)-(3) are genuinely incoherent, the description cannot be used to fix the reference of 'God'. Because if it were to be capable of doing so we should have to be able to decide which being was supreme independently of knowing who God is. And, if the above arguments are correct, this is impossible.

(c) 'the proper object of worship'

This again looks like a promising suggestion, since it would appear that all believers in God would hold that He is the proper object of worship. But the use of the word 'proper' involves us in a value judgement, and there is no guarantee of agreement. It is possible to use the word 'God' in a meaningful and understandable way even if you don't believe that God is the proper object of worship. And this may well be so for some who do not deny that God exists. Satanists worship Satan, and so might be presumed to hold Satan to be the proper object of worship, and yet they do not deny that God exists²¹. This would suggest the following modification:

21. It could, of course, be argued that it is precisely because they regard God as the proper object of worship that Satanists, as an act of rebellion, choose to worship the devil instead. But the position in the text is, at least, a tenable one.

(d) 'the being which Christians hold to be the proper object of worship'.

But this will not do, for it is either circular or false. Its plausibility derives from the presence of 'Christian' on the right hand side. Now, how do we determine whether a given person or sect is Christian or not? It would seem to be at least a necessary condition of being a Christian to hold that God is the proper object of worship. Which means that we could rewrite the description under consideration as 'the being which people who hold that God is the proper object of worship and fulfil some other condition hold to be the proper object of worship'. But now 'God' appears on both sides, so it is useless as an explanation of meaning since it is circular.

But if we were to suppose that we could get a hold on 'Christian' without reference to God, we would have severed the requisite necessary connection between 'God' and the description. For now it would be possible for Christians to hold that some other being is the proper object of worship. So this description also cannot be used to fix the reference of 'God'.

(e) 'the one and only god'

This description is a possible way of fixing the references only if 'god' expresses a genuine sortal concept. I shall argue later (in section 1.7) that this is not so. Moreover, if the later arguments are sound, the description is not even true of God. For there are many gods, and some of them exist. And if we resort to saying that God is the one and only true god, we end up back at the position of (c). So this attempt fails as well as the rest.

So, then, none of the descriptions that we have discussed will do the work that the descriptions account demands of them, and it seems to me that any other attempt would lack even the apparent plausibility of those I have met. The possibility of heresy is always there; you can understand 'God', believe that God exists, and still deny that God is the F, for any F whatsoever which has its meaning fixed independently of 'God'. Which means that no description can explain the meaning of 'God' and fix its reference.

1.5 'God' as a title

The case for 'God' as a title is put by one of its advocates,

Nelson Pike, as follows

'God' is a descriptive expression rather than a proper name. However, in order to take account of the intuitive plausibility of the proper name analysis of this term, I shall assume that 'God' is a special kind of descriptive expression, viz, what I shall call a 'title-phrase'. Grammatically, title-phrases are descriptive expressions which often do the work of proper names and that often appear in linguistic environments associated with proper names.^{22A}

He also offers an argument:

I could also imagine an atheist affirming that Yahweh exists - just as one might admit that a mountain or a tree worshipped by the pagans exists. In this sort of case, the difference between the religious believer and the religious non-believer would not emerge over the question of whether Yahweh exists. It would emerge over the question of whether Yahweh is God. Let's then ask what it is to say that Yahweh (or Jesus) is God²³.

He then says that theologians have differed as to their answer, but that it is either to say that Yahweh functions in a certain capacity with respect to other individuals, perhaps as ruler of the universe, or that he has a certain rank or status with respect to other individuals, as being the greatest being. He does not arbitrate between these two suggestions, but contends that on either of them 'God' would be a title.

22A. *ibid*, p29

23. *ibid*, pp30-1.

Two questions now arise: first as to whether his account of title phrases is correct, and second as to whether 'God' is a referring expression of this sort. Let us begin by asking how title phrases are generally used, and in particular what the nature of their descriptive content is.

A point not stressed by Pike is that titles are conferred within institutions. One only has a king if one has a monarchical system of government, and one only as a general if one has an army. This is an important fact about titles, for if we overlook it we will fail to see what kind of descriptive content titles have. For the fact that makes an individual the bearer of a title is invariably an institutional fact. The role that the title holder plays is a role within an institution, and the status that he has is a status within an institution. And if we leave aside the part played by the institution, then to say that 'God' is a title is not a different claim from that 'God' is a description. So that if we are to take the claim that 'God' is a title seriously, we must set its use in an institutional context.

Now it seems to me that 'god' really does function in this way. For there we do have an institution, namely a body of believers who assign a special status and function to another being, their god. So that the question 'is Yahweh God?' could be seen as being elliptical for 'is Yahweh the true god?'. And this seems to make good sense in that it shows the difference between the non-religious man who accepts that Yahweh exists and the believer is that the former

unlike the latter does not have Yahweh as his god, that is he does not participate in the institution in which Yahweh has this special status.

But 'God' is rather different in that it is, as we have seen, possible to use 'God' to refer to God without ascribing to God the special status, without participating in the institution of religion. The question as to whether 'God' is a title must stand or fall with the question as to whether God is God is an institutional fact. The evidence of Scripture would seem to be against this; thus the ninetieth psalm

Before the mountains were brought forth or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world from everlasting to everlasting thou art God (verse 2).

would seem to be nonsense if 'God' were a title conferred within the institution or religion. Moreover it would be right for a worshipper of Ra to say 'Ra is God' - not just 'Ra is a god'.

A second point about 'God' being a title is that titles are never rigid designators, and no move parallel to the alpha-transformation of descriptions is available to make it into one. Since a title is conferred it can never be a necessary truth that it has to be conferred on one being rather than any other. Which means that if 'God' were a title, it would always be logically possible for us to give it to some other being. Which is not in conformity with what we think about 'God'. Therefore we must reject the view that 'God' is a title.

1.6 The Motivation of the Descriptions Theory

In this section I want to try to explain why so many people have argued that 'God' must have some kind of descriptive content.

I think that this derives from the idea that God possesses all His attributes necessarily. If we couple this with the once popular view that all necessity is created by convention, and turns on the meanings of words, then we get at once to having to build the possession of these attributes into the meaning of 'God'.

This is not the place to attempt a full scale refutation of conventionalism, but I could make the following observation, which I think gets close to the heart of the conventionalist misunderstanding. There is a distinction to be drawn between statements and propositions, a statement being a use of a sentence to express a proposition. Now, strictly speaking, we should no more talk of false and true statements than we should of false or true sentences. Rather a particular utterance of a statement is correct or incorrect. Truth is a "property" of propositions. Now, what we do by convention is to establish that certain sentences can be used to express necessarily true propositions. So that the issue of a statement expresses a necessarily true proposition by convention. But convention has no part to play in making the proposition necessarily true, for this is independent of language. The proposition expressed by " $2 + 2 = 4$ " has always been true, and was not made so by the invention of numerals. But that " $2 + 2 = 4$ " expresses the proposition it does rather than any other, is a matter of convention.

So I would reject conventionalism, and with it the idea that the necessity of God's attributes derives from the meaning of the word 'God'. Instead I shall try to suggest why we should think of the attributes as being possessed necessarily.

Suppose we define a possible world as a maximal consistent state of affairs. Now, if we let P be the state of affairs of God existing with attributes S, we may write any possible world where this obtains as P & Now, given that God is immutable and everlasting, there will be no time at which the world did not include that P and no time at which it will cease to include P. Moreover there will be no possible world which does not include that P, assuming God to be immutable across possible worlds as well as times. Therefore it will be the case that God is necessarily S, deriving from His role as creator and His immutability rather than the meaning of the word 'God'. But, this does not render the supposition that God might (epistemic) have not been S unintelligible. For, although Christians do believe, for example, that God is omnipotent, and hence necessarily omnipotent, they could be mistaken on this matter. If it were found, perhaps through divine revelation, that there were some things that God could not do, this would only show that a mistake had been made and that, as it happens, God is necessarily less than omnipotent. And in this situation any being that was omnipotent would not be God, as a matter of fact, not definition. So that if God is omnipotent and someone denies this, they are making a factual error, not betraying linguistic incompetence.

This position does involve the drawing of a sharp distinction between epistemic and metaphysical necessity, but this is by no means objectionable. Provided that we insist only on metaphysical necessity for God's attributes, and allow the epistemic possibility of His possessing attributes other than those we ascribe to Him, we need feel no temptation to insist that this necessity flows from the meaning of 'God'. Indeed, to allow for the above epistemic possibility we have to reject the conventionalist view.

So then, the descriptions view might be seen as resulting from a false account of the necessity of God's attributes. Since the necessity can be accounted for in the alternative way suggested above, and this other way has the, in my view, admirable consequence of allowing for the possibility of a mistake as to the nature of these attributes, we have no reason to share this motive, and so no reason to adopt the descriptions account.

The same sort of mistake seems to underlie the title account.

There it has to be held that only God could perform the appropriate role. But why should anyone think that this is so? Only, it would seem, in virtue of God necessarily possessing some attributes that no other being could possess. Now the only reason that no other being could possess them is that God is held to possess them necessarily and no two beings could possess them at the same time. So that this too boils down to no more than the necessary possession of certain attributes, like omnipotence. So that the same sort of motivation can be seen to underlie both the description and the title accounts, and this is a motivation which, as I have shown, we have no good reason to share.

1.7 'God' as a proper name

This view has attracted far more objections in the literature than the other two views, mainly because those people who have addressed themselves to this problem have seen the idea that 'God' is a proper name as the naive view, which they have wished to replace with something more sophisticated. This means that there are a number of well known objections to this view, and I shall consider the five most usual of them.

(a) In order to understand a proper name we have to know two things; what kind of thing the bearer is, and which thing of that kind it is. Both of these have been held to present problems in the case of 'God'; here I want to look at the first condition, the second will be for consideration later, in chapter three.

Why do we have to know what kind of thing the bearer is? An argument for this is as follows: in order to understand the proper name we have to be able to re-identify its bearer. But questions of identity only make sense if we supply a sortal for the thing to be re-identified under, since otherwise no determinate answer can be given. Because, for example, Sir John Cutler's stockings may be the same stockings, but different material, because they have been so often mended. This in turn means that not any sortal will do as an answer to our question; it has to be a sortal which supplies criteria of identity and individuation.

This claim, recently championed by Geach,²⁴ the so-called "relative identity thesis", is, I think mistaken, as Wiggins has shown in Identity and Spatio-Temporal Continuity²⁵, where he makes it plain that in fact different answers never could be given. (The example above fails because stockings are never at any time identical with the material which constitutes them.) But the need for the sortal remains. This is not so that we can re-identify the object in the future, but so that we can identify it at the time that it is named. The point being that a mere gesture will never be sufficient to pick an object out. The point is well made in the Blue Book²⁶. If I point at a pencil and say 'this is tove', my utterance could be interpreted as 'this is a pencil', 'this is hard', 'this is blue', or in a number of other ways. So too, if I point at a pair of stockings and call them Castor and Pollux, it is essential that one knows whether I have named the stockings or the material that constitutes them, otherwise one has not grasped the introduction of the name. So that we really do need a sortal that supplies us with criteria of identity and individuation.

This means that we cannot answer a question as to the sort of thing God is by saying that He is a thing or a being. Because these are only dummy-sortals and supply no criteria. But replies which do suggest themselves are 'spirit' and 'god'.

24 Geach, op cit., especially p39.

25 David Wiggins, Identity and Spatio-Temporal Continuity, Oxford 1967, pp1-26.

26 L. Wittgenstein, The Blue Book, Oxford 1958, See p2.

Let us look at 'spirit' first. Objections to this answer centre around the contention that the notion of a spirit is illegitimate. That is to say that it does not refer to a distinct type of being, but rather to an aspect of another type of being, namely human beings. Of course there is a well-established use in which it does function in this way, as exemplified by 'Bloggs is a lively spirit', but there is an equally well-established use for which this is not so. A consultation of my dictionary reveals the following:

1. Intelligent or immaterial part of man, soul; . . .
2. Person viewed as possessing this, especially with reference to particular mental or moral qualities;
3. Rational or intelligent being not connected with material body, incorporeal person, elf, fairy, as God is a spirit.²⁷

Perhaps one should not place too much faith in dictionaries when doing philosophy, but the above extract does back up my contention in two ways. First it does show that 'spirit' is used to pick out a distinct kind of being, including, I suppose, elves, fairies, brownies, angels and archangels. And second it indicates that when we say that God is a spirit we use it in this sense.

This would mean that those who wished to deny that the notion of spirit is a legitimate one would have to try a different tack. This would be to show that there was an internal incoherence in the notion, on the "grounds that there could not be an incorporeal person". To meeting this objection, which is independently important, since if there can be no incorporeal person God cannot exist, I shall devote the second chapter.

27 Concise Oxford English Dictionary, 5th edition, Oxford 1964, p1236.

The third objection to the answer 'spirit' would be to say that whilst it is a legitimate notion, it is a dummy sortal rather like "thing", and so fails to supply the necessary criteria. I hope that this claim will also be shown to be false in the second chapter, so I shall content myself with a couple of preliminary remarks here. If we consider the case of poltergeists we can see that such remarks as 'the poltergeist is back again' and 'the poltergeist here is a different one from the one in our house' can be said. This shows that we do, in practice both individuate and identify them. If our criteria for so doing are imprecise, it is explicable by the infrequency with which we are called upon to use them. That we can say such things at least shows that identity and individuation questions are not senseless. Hopefully, I shall get rather more precision into the notion when I discuss it at greater length later.

We might now look at the second suggested answer, 'god'. Here I think, it really is true that there is no distinct kind of being picked out. This can be seen from a consideration of the enormous variety of gods in the history of man. Things which have been treated as gods by men range from the spirits worshipped by Christians and Muslims, through the anthropomorphic deities of the Greeks and Romans, to natural objects such as the sun and oak trees. What entitles all these things to be called gods is that they all play a certain role in the forms of life of groups of people. Now, given this it would seem that if X is a god, then X is an F which is a god, where F is some criteria supplying sortal. For all the various gods have to be identified and individuated according as to the kinds of things they are; there is no set of criteria equally applicable to all things which are gods. Now it could be objected to this that many of the

things that I have mentioned are false gods, and false gods are not gods, in the same way as false money is not money. But what prevents false money from being money is that it cannot be used as such, and here the analogy breaks down. Because all these things are used as gods, and this fact is sufficient to ensure that they are gods. But, the objector could continue, they are not used as such, for to be treated as god is to be paid latria, and latria cannot be paid, for example to an oak tree. For it would not be possible for us to conceive of ourselves as owing sacrifice to an oak tree, or, indeed to any inanimate object. For whilst we may be said to owe our lives to an inanimate object, in the sense that if that object did not exist, then we would be unable to live, as we owe our lives to the sun, here there is no sense of a debt which has to be repaid. Gratitude is appropriate only when someone does something he need not have done. But since what an inanimate object does is causally determined, it can never be due gratitude. So that no inanimate object can be paid latria.

But what this shows is not that inanimate objects cannot be paid latria, but that if they are they must be mistakenly be thought of as personified. If I mistake an inanimate robot for a person then I may well be grateful for what it does for me and my gratitude will be no less genuine because it is misplaced. So too, the sun worshipper can pay the sun latria, provided he sees the sun as an agent with a will of its own. Further, some false gods are animate, such as the Roman Emperors who were worshipped in their lifetimes. Of course we who believe in God would deny that they were due latria, but this because, as a matter of fact, they were not owed the lives of their worshippers, not due to some impossibility of their being paid

latria. So that it is quite possible for things of different types to be treated as gods, and so be gods. So that we can say that there are many gods, but that they do not form a distinct sort of being under which we could pick out things.

So that we may answer the first objection by saying that God is a spirit, although this will leave the problem of the coherence of the notion of spirit which will be dealt with in the second chapter.

(b) The second argument turns on the fact that proper names can never occur in the position of a predicate. Therefore no statement of the form ' - is God' could be a predication. Now, consider

(1) Jesus Christ is God.

This is not an identity statement, and so, at least according to one writer²⁸ it must be a predication. Which would mean that 'God' occurred in predicate position in (1).

The basis of this objection is sound in that we have to agree that proper names cannot occur in predicate position. Because 'being N.N.' is not a property, ' - is N.N.' cannot express a predication. But do we have to take (1) as a predication? (1) immerses us in all the difficulties associated with the Trinity, and so we must first try to get some sort of understanding of this mysterious doctrine.

28 Michael Durrant, The Logical Status of 'God', London 1973, pp18-9.

First, then, what is this doctrine? It is that the Father, Son and Holy Ghost are three persons in one substance, to be worshipped as Trinity and Unity, and as Unity in Trinity. The Father, Son and Holy Ghost are all God, and yet they are all one god, not three gods. Or, as the thirty-nine articles put it:

In unity of this Godhead there are three persons of one substance, power and eternity, the Father, Son and Holy Ghost.²⁹

So much for a statement of the doctrine, now is it possible to come to some sort of understanding of it?

I think we might begin by looking at an example from nature, that of allotropes. Here we have a single element that manifests itself in a variety of forms. Thus coal, graphite and diamond are all carbon, and rhombic, plastic and monoclinic sulphurs are all sulphur. So here we have a single substance which appears in three forms, just as God is supposed to do. Now, consider the statement

(2) Diamond is carbon.

This is a statement of precisely the same form as (1). Like (1) it is non-reversible, since

(3) Carbon is diamond

is false, as is

29 Article I.

(4) God is Jesus Christ.

Nor can we infer from (2) together with

(5) Graphite is carbon

to (6) Graphite is diamond

any more than we could take (1) together with

(7) God the Father is God

to get (8) God the Father is Jesus Christ.

Now, if (1) and (2) were identity statements both these operations would be legitimate. So, they are not identity statements. But does this mean they are predications?

A point against this would be provided by Kripke's discussion of 'gold' in Naming and Necessity.³⁰ Here he shows that 'gold' acquires meaning by baptism, in much the same way as proper names do. This would indicate that 'is gold' no more expresses a property than 'is N.N.' does. Which would mean that (2) would not be a predication.

But if it is not a predication or an identity statement, what is it? Obviously we should need to appeal to a third sense of 'is'.

30 Kripke, op cit., pp314ff.

Wiggins argues for such a third sense of 'is' in Identity and Spatio-Temporal Continuity³¹. One could apply his argument to the sort of case under consideration in the following way. Consider a particular diamond, say the Star of India. Now it is implausible to maintain that the Star of India has the property of being carbon on the grounds that we could destroy the Star of India, perhaps by subjecting it to intense pressure and heat, so turning it into coal and yet not alter the fact that we have a quantity of carbon. From this it would look as if the quantity of carbon had the property of being diamond rather than vice versa.

Now it has been objected that this is not a distinct sense of 'is' at all, but merely elliptical for some predication like 'is constituted by'. But this would not tell against 'God' being a proper name, for there is nothing to stop proper names occurring as parts of complex predicates. So even if statements like (1) and (2) had to be re-written in this way, the objection would still fall.

But, none the less there is something strange about saying that carbon constitutes diamond, and something even stranger about saying that God constitutes Jesus Christ. Perhaps for this reason; if we say that X constitutes Y it would seem to make sense to suppose that X exists apart from Y. But if we look at

(9) carbon constitutes diamond, coal and graphite

it makes no sense to think of carbon existing apart from diamond coal and graphite. If we introduced a term to apply equally to these three stuffs, say 'cryptonite', then

31 Wiggins, op cit., p13.

(10) carbon is cryptonite

would seem to be plausibly held to be an identity statement. That is, 'cryptonite' would just be another name for carbon. Now this is not all that harmful in the case of carbon, because since 'carbon' is a mass term there is no temptation to think of diamond as being a part of carbon. But there would on this account seem to be a temptation to think of the Holy Ghost as being a part of God, or to press the analogy with carbon so far that we start to think of 'God' as a mass term. But God is simple, and so has no parts, and is individual and so 'God' is not a mass term, which means that both temptations have to be resisted. How this is to be done is obviously a thorny, but none the less urgent, problem. The solution will, however, have to wait; the differences from 'carbon' stem from the fact that God is, and carbon is not, a spirit, and so only when an account of the concept of spirit has been given will we be in a position to sort out the relation between God and His persons. A sketch of a way of approaching this problem will be given in the second chapter. But the analogy with carbon will do enough for the present, in that it will show that ^{we need not} ~~we~~ regard (1) as a predication, as it shows that not all 'is' statements are either identity statements or predications.

(c) The third objection comes from Geach;

A strong point in favour of Aquinas's view (that 'God' is not a proper name) is that 'God' is translated into other languages, not transliterated, as proper names are.³²

32 P.T. Geach and G.E.M. Anscombe, Three Philosophers, Oxford 1961, p109.

This need not detain us long. The premise is simply false; there are undisputed proper names, such as 'Firenze', or 'Deutschland' which are translated, not transliterated into other languages. Moreover, the reason why 'God' should be translated rather than transliterated has a good explanation. Most names are conferred within some linguistic community; people are born into groups speaking one language rather than another and towns are situated within communities speaking one language rather than another. The names of these communities will therefore have a kind of priority, and we will have a reason for transliterating rather than translating them. But no community has an especial claim on God, and so it is natural for each community to confer their own name and use that in preference for that of another community. An exception is the Jews and 'JHWH'; their especial claim on God has led to a frequent use of transliteration of this name when talking about God with particular reference to the Jews; but with the rise of Christianity and with the corresponding decrease of the special status of the Jews, their monopoly of His name has gone too, and it would seem unnatural for a modern Christian to use their name for God in preference to his own.

(d) The fourth objection, also from Geach, runs like this;

There is indeed . . . only one God, but there being many Gods would not be an untrue supposition but merely unintelligible if what were in question were the plurality of a given named individual.³³

33 *ibid*, x.

This objection is basically sound, since any proper name is applicable to one and only one individual, it is senseless to talk of many N.N.s or some N.N.s or whatever. So if it is really sensible to talk in this way about God, then 'God' is not a proper name.

In raising a possible objection to the oneness of God, St. Thomas quotes St. Paul;³⁴

For although there are many so called gods in heaven or in earth, as indeed there are many 'gods' and many 'lords', yet for us there is but one God, the father.

This quotation seems to me to get right to the heart of the confusion, which is no more than a muddle between 'God' and 'god'. That St. Paul has the general term in mind is obvious from the first half of the quotation, but it is obscured when the capital is used in the reference to the Father. But his use of 'God' must be in the same sense as his use of 'god' in the first half, otherwise the contrast between the Christian and the heathen is not made. The capital is a mark of respect, not to indicate that 'god' is not what is intended, but it does tend to obscure the difference between the general term and the proper name. So, I would say that whenever we speak of a plurality of gods, it is the general term that is intended.

34 I Corinthians, Chapter 8, verse 7.

Geach trades on the very same confusion in another argument;

When St. Augustine and his missionaries landed in England they found the English paying latria to Woden, Thor and other imaginary being to whom they applied the word 'God' and the missionaries taught them to apply this word not to Woden, Thor and the rest, but solely to the blessed Trinity. Similarly in other missionary countries. This makes it clear that 'God' is not a proper name as ³⁵Woden (sic) was meant to be, but a descriptive term.

It is hard to think of this as other than a wilful confusion between 'God' and 'god'. By calling these imaginary beings 'gods' the English were describing the role that they played in their form of life, and what Augustine taught them was that this role should be played by only one being, namely God. What the example makes clear is that 'god' is not a proper name, but then no one would have supposed that it was. The example says nothing at all about 'God',³⁶

But now it might be objected that there is no distinction here at all, and that 'god' and 'God' display the same logic. That is to say that 'God' is, itself, the general term. That this is false is clearly demonstrable by the difference in truth value between

(11) There are many gods

and (12) There are many Gods.

35 P.T. Geach, *God and the Soul*, London 1969, p109.

36 It is, of course, no accident that the word for the general class of gods should be used as the name of God. This is a result of the conflict between monotheism and polytheism, in which the upholders of monotheism were able to emphasise that there was only one god by using the general term with unique reference, beginning its development into a proper name.

(11) is true, since it says that there are a number of beings, real and imaginary, which play the role of gods for human beings. (12) is certainly not true, and I would be inclined to think that it is unintelligible, unless construed as elliptical for

(13) There are many beings whose name is 'God'.

So construed I have no idea whether it is true or false, although I have never met anyone else with this name. Either way, however, the considerations relevant to the determination of the truth value of (13) will differ greatly from those relevant to (11).

(e) The fifth objection is this. A genuine proper name refers to some individual. Any individual must depend for its identification on some sort of reference to the spatio-temporal framework. God does not so depend, and therefore 'God' cannot be a proper name. How are we to react to this argument?

We might begin by pointing out that proper names are given to numbers. Thus, '2' is the name of a number, but 2 is not a spatio-temporal entity. But numbers do have position of a sort, in that they have a position in a series. Durrant has argued that this is dependent on our assigning them a spatial position,³⁷ as points on a line, say. This seems to me highly dubious. For even if we were to grant that number names had to be taught in this way, it would be still absurd to suggest that the number itself had any kind of spatial position. If a child asks where the number two is, that only shows that he has not yet understood what a number is.

37 Durrant, op cit., pp25-6.

Bearing this in mind, we might try to see exactly where the problem is supposed to lie. Is the difficulty about the lack of a spatial or temporal referent, one about learning the name, or one about how it can be introduced into language in the first place? The first would be no problem, since we all learn to use names which no longer have spatio-temporal referents; 'James Joyce' to name but one. So the problem must centre around introduction.

This is a real problem, and one which I shall devote the whole of the third chapter to an attempt to meet. Therefore I shall confine myself at present to a couple of preliminary remarks.

What is needed to introduce a name is to be able to produce a description which picks an object out in the way Donellan calls referential³⁸ in a situation of confrontation. It can be seen how this can be done, given that the thing in question is capable of acting, from the following example.

Suppose that I am plagued by a poltergeist who is given to knocking a jug off my sideboard. I am sitting in the room with a friend when the jug falls off the sideboard. I say 'I name him "Johnny"' My mystified friend asks who I mean, and I tell him that I meant the agent which just knocked the jug off my sideboard. Now, in fact the jug fell because of the vibrations of a passing pantehnicon. But the referential nature of the description is shown by the fact that when the jug falls again, this time due to the poltergeist, my friend correctly remarks that Johnny is up to his tricks again, and when,

38 Donellan, op cit.

later, now knowing the true cause of the original jug disturbance, he is introduced to the pantehnicon driver, he feels no pressure to call him 'Johnny' and to ask what I call the poltergeist.

So that an active being, especially one who performs a number of pattern forming actions, can be referred to by a referential description. And if someone says that the spatial and temporal nature of the actions make the agent spatio-temporal, I can simply say that in that case, and that sense, God is spatio-temporal too.

These considerations might be enough to show that the objection cannot be credited with an easy victory, but it remains a serious problem, and what we really need is a detailed account of how 'God' can be introduced into language. This will form the matter of the third chapter.

In this section I have looked at five oft-quoted objections to taking 'God' as a proper name. I found that none were decisive, although their rebuttal will take more work, explaining how the notion of a spirit is coherent, what the relation between God and His persons is, and how the term gets introduced. If, then, I am able to provide solutions to these problems, the position will be that the only workable account of 'God' is that it is a proper name, as earlier in the chapter I pointed to decisive objections to the rival accounts.

2. PROBLEMS WITH THE NOTION OF A SPIRIT.

2.1 Introduction.

In 1.7(a) I said that God was a spirit. If anything is to be a spirit, then it must be

(i) incorporeal, and

(ii) capable of performing the actions and activities that we typically associate with persons.

Now, Christians do claim that God the Father, (who shall often in this chapter be referred to as 'God' for the sake of brevity) is both incorporeal and a person, which is to say that He fulfils conditions (i) and (ii). But it has been argued that nothing can fulfil these conditions simultaneously on the grounds that the possession of a body is essential for the performance of the activities that we associate with personality. If this contention were correct, there would be two consequences. First the Christian conception of God as an incorporeal person would have to be mistaken, and second, the view that 'God' is a proper name would be in jeopardy, because it would have been shown that nothing can fall under the criteria-supplying sortal that I claimed God fell under. Therefore I shall now try to show that God can perform the functions of a person even though He is incorporeal.

2.2 Are persons bodies?

One argument against there being incorporeal persons, and so against there being spirits, is that the criteria for the identification and individuation of persons are grounded in their bodies. If were so, then we would have no means of identifying and individuating a spirit, and so we could no longer maintain that 'spirit' was a criteria-supplying sortal, or even that there were spirits.

I want to look at this argument by considering two writers who do give this prominence to the body, Strawson and Williams.

(a) Strawson.

Strawson's idea is that the concept of a person is primitive, and applies to anything to which both physical and mental predicates can be applied. This doctrine is not obviously correct; for one thing it proclaims animals to be persons whereas this is, at least, arguable. But what we are interested in here are his arguments designed to show that persons require bodies, and cannot be conceived of as immaterial thinking substances.

His argument turns on the following principle:

that it is a necessary condition of one's ascribing states of consciousness to oneself in the way that one does, that one should be prepared to ascribe them to others who are not oneself.³⁹

39. P.F.Strawson, Individuals, London 1959, p99.

He then objects that if the subjects of consciousness were Cartesian egos, one could not ascribe states of consciousness to them, presumably because one could never know which state of consciousness they were in.

But this argument tacitly assumes that all subjects of consciousness are alike. Now, what is to stop me from regarding other human beings as the sort of entities that Strawson claims they are, and yet conceiving of myself as a Cartesian ego? Perhaps one could argue against this in this way; there are no grounds for claiming that there is a difference of status between myself and other human beings. Since I am a human being, there is no reason to suppose that I am significantly different from other human beings. But now I could say this; while it is true that all human beings are indeed persons of the sort that Strawson suggests, in addition there are persons of a different sort, namely incorporeal persons. They, looking at the matter from their point of view, are perfectly well able to ascribe states of consciousness to human beings, and to themselves, and can point to a significant difference between themselves and human beings, in that their experiences are unconnected with the state of any body. There are now two difficulties. Firstly, we will have problems in ascribing psychological predicates to them, and secondly, it might be argued that there was no point in using the same words to speak of their psychological states as we use to speak of ours, since we are such very different sorts of thing. These difficulties I shall attempt to meet in 2.9. For the moment it is enough to notice that the possibility of this other type of person is enough to avoid Strawson's argument. What this argument establishes is that Cartesian egos cannot be all the persons that there are, not that

there are no persons which are Cartesian egos. Strawson himself allows the possibility of disembodied persons, but does insist that they have always to think of themselves as having once had a body. Why he should say this is unclear, since he does not argue for it, beyond his arguing for the primitiveness of the concept, as it is not required for their being able to ascribe states of consciousness either to others or to themselves.

Strawson puts forward a second anti-Cartesian argument, this time turning on individuation. This is that the uniqueness of the body guarantees the uniqueness of the person, but not the uniqueness of the thinking subject. The idea is this; there might be associated with the body an infinite number of qualitatively indistinguishable subjects, or, in Kantian vein, consciousness might be transmitted through an infinite series of subjects like motion through a series of perfectly elastic balls. But this argument works only if we were using the thinking subject to individuate our persons in the first place. Sameness of body and sameness of egos are not exhaustive alternatives as means of individuation. If we could offer some other criterion of individuation, for instance if the memory criterion were adequate, then the person would consist precisely of these clusters of egos, or these series of egos, just as the human body, and so the person as Strawson conceives it, consists of a cluster of constantly changing cells. If we have some alternative means of individuation, that we cannot show that bodies and thinking subjects are in one to one correlation is of no importance.

Thus Strawson fails to establish the impossibility of incorporeal persons. That human beings are not Cartesian egos he does show, by

methods similar to those used by Wittgenstein in the Philosophical Investigations.⁴⁰ But the conclusion he wants to establish has to go beyond human beings, for to show that bodies are essential to some persons is not to show that they are essential to all. None of his arguments can establish more than that not all persons could be Cartesian egos, and that reference to a Cartesian ego is useless as a means of identification and individuation. But neither of these things are required for there to be incorporeal persons, and so he fails to show that a body is essential to personality. As for the difficulties that result from the Private Language Argument considerations, I shall try to deal with them in 2.9.

(b) Williams.

Williams has written a number of articles⁴¹ in which he has defended the body criterion of personal identity, maintained that persons are bodies, and held that without reference to a body no sense can be given to the idea of a particular person.

In Personal Identity and Individuation he gives two arguments in favour of saying that persons are bodies. One is that we ought not to say that a man displaying the personality and memories of another

40. L.Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, Oxford 1972. The sections following 243 contain most of the Private Language Argument. This is not the place to discuss this matter, but I would contend that the points raised by this argument render the idea ^{that there are} Cartesian egos untenable.

41. B.A.O.Williams, Problems of the Self, Cambridge 1973, especially Personal Identity and Individuation, Bodily Continuity and Personality, and Are Persons Bodies?

person is that other person because the situation could be repeated and it would be untrue to say that both the changed men were that other person. He says

If it is logically possible that Charles should undergo the changes described, then it is possible that some other man should simultaneously undergo the same changes; eg that both Charles and his brother Robert should be found in this condition. What should we say in this case? They cannot both be Guy Fawkes; if they were then Guy Fawkes would be in two places at once, which is absurd. Moreover, if they were both identical with Guy Fawkes they would both be identical with one another, which is also absurd.⁴²

But here he is leaping to a claim of absurdity too quickly, and in a way which is question begging. It is because he believes that persons are bodies that he says that it is absurd for a person to be in two places at once. For, of course, if a person is a body then he is where the body is, and it really is absurd to say that a body can be in two places at once, because bodies are identified by reference to their spatio-temporal position. But if we reject the notion that persons are bodies, we do not have to follow this way of deciding where they are. We could then propose another way of deciding where a person is, perhaps by reference to his perceptual environment, for example.

Let us see how this might work. Consider this situation. There is a person who, when we ask him what he sees, describes not one room but two. Similarly for all other reports on what he senses. But his body is not located in such a position as to correspond with either

42. *ibid.*, p8.

of these perceptual environments. What are we to say here? We could say that the person was where his body is, and was perceiving at a distance. Or we could say that he was in one of the two locations that he describes. Or we could say that he was in both of them. Against the second position it is an objection that we should have no reason to say that he was in one of the places rather than the other. But how are we to decide between the other two positions? The first would be supported by an appeal to the general principle that persons are where their bodies are. But this is out of order here because it begs the question. Or we might support it by saying that we decide where someone is by looking and seeing. But this point is balanced by the fact that we decide where we are ourselves by looking around us, a method which would support the third answer. So it begins to look like a matter for arbitrary decision. I shall therefore give what I think to be the most reasonable position.

In the case I have just described I would favour the first answer. This is because perception is not the only activity that we demand of persons, and action and communication would still take place where the body is. But if we were to change the example and suppose that the person communicates, in a manner akin to telepathy, with people in the vicinity of his viewpoints and acts, in a manner akin to telekinesis, in the vicinities of his viewpoints, then there would seem to be little reason to suppose, or to say, that the person was where his body was. There would still be reason to say that the body was the body of the person, because the person would be affected by the states of that body. But since all the distinctively personal activity takes place elsewhere, there would be little point in saying that that was where the person was. And since the personal activity

is taking place in two locations we have every reason to say that the person is in both of them, since there are no grounds on which we could discriminate between them. To continue to say that the person was where the body is would be simply to take refuge in a dogma. The possibility of this situation therefore knocks down Williams' claim that it is absurd to suppose that a person could be in two places at once, unless we already presuppose that a person is where his body is. But since this is part of what he was trying to argue for, he cannot use it to support his position.

Williams' second alleged absurdity looks more plausibly correct, because it seems as if Charles and Robert are clearly non-identical. But it is difficult to show this without begging the question. Suppose we tried to use Leibnitz's Law, and said that the predicate 'remembers waking up in Nottingham' applies to Charles but not to Robert, and so they cannot be identical. But on the hypothesis there is no longer a Charles and a Robert, but a bi-located Guy Fawkes. And of course the predicate does apply to Guy because it applies to his Charles-body. Nor can we get a contradiction by saying that the incompatible predicate 'remembers not waking up in Nottingham' applies to Guy's Robert-body, and hence also to Guy Fawkes himself. Because Guy, in his Charles-body, did wake up there, and so cannot remember having not woken up there. What would count against their being identical would be the lack of communication between them, which could force us to attribute contradictory beliefs to Guy Fawkes. (The Robert-body might believe that P and the Charles-body that not-P, which would mean that Guy Fawkes believed both P and not-P). So what counts against them being the same person is this; that although they may have identical remembered pasts, they will not

have identical futures, which could give rise to contradictory beliefs. So, on the basis of the personality criterion it might still be possible to identify Robert and Charles as distinct persons. Notice that in the example of the bi-located person I used above there was no problem about lack of communication, and so no question of there being two persons seemed to arise there.

So, it is not, as Williams claims, absurd to suppose Charles and Robert to both be bodies of the same person, and so, as persons, identical. But it is likely that they would reveal themselves to be distinct, since there is nothing in the example, as Williams has set it up, to rule out divergent behaviour subsequent to the transformation.

Thus far I have taken it for granted that acting and communicating are possible apart from a body. This is open to dispute, and an examination of these issues will form the matter of the next few sections. But first we ought to look at Williams' second argument. This turns on the alleged inadequacy of memory as a criterion of personal identity, together with the assumption that there could be no criterion other than the memory or the body. It is held that to judge the truth of memory claims we have to refer to the body. Thus if someone remembers being in a certain place at a certain time, the truth of the claim is assessed in accordance with whether or not his body was in that place at that time. But the argument is mistaken, through failing to distinguish between how we do, in fact, assess the memory claims of human beings, and how we would assess the memory claims of any person whatsoever. All that we need to assess the truth of someones claim to remember having X-ed at some time in the

past, is to be able to say that he did X in the past. So if it is possible to say that an incorporeal person X-ed, then it is possible to say that that person's memory of having X-ed is veracious. Therefore all we need to be able to do is to predicate actions and the like of incorporeal persons; if we can do this we can assess their memory claims as well. And given that it is possible to distinguish between true and false memories without reference to a body, this objection to the use of memory as a criterion of personal identity fails.

But we could ask the question of whether we need a criterion of personal identity of this sort at all. For it could be, that 'person' is not this kind of sortal at all. When we say that a being is a person we say that it participates in a certain range of activities which we regard as being distinctively personal. But the person might well be identified and individuated under some other sortal. To give an analogy, we can say that a small child is a 'shocker' and that a football match is a 'shocker', but it would be absurd to suggest we had identity criteria for shockers that applied both to children and to football matches. Shockers have to be identified under the criteria supplying sortal under which they fall, as children or football matches, or whatever. Similarly we can have human beings who are persons, but who are identified and individuated as human beings, which explains the importance of the body in such cases, and we have spirits which are persons, and which are identified and individuated as spirits. So strictly speaking we should not talk about 'same person' but 'same F which is a person', where F is a criteria supplying sortal. Now, if it is possible to say that A did X, where A is a spirit, then it will also be possible to

say that A did both X and Y. Which will give a sort of identity criterion for spirits.

This sort of account would enable us to get on quite well if it turned out that 'person' was not a criteria-supplying sortal. If, however, we find that 'person' does supply criteria, we will have no need of it. What I must now do is examine the concept of a person in detail, so that we can see exactly what is involved in the claim that something is a person.

2.3 THE CONCEPT OF A PERSON

At the end of the last section I suggested that it could be that 'person' supplies no criteria of identity and individuation. I want now to examine the concept of a person to see whether this is in fact the case.

Williams says that 'it can scarcely be an insignificant fact that our paradigm (to put it mildly) of a person is a human being'⁴³. He is, of course, right in this. But it is an equally significant fact that we have these two concepts, human being and person, and it might be important to maintain a distinction between them. So that we have to answer the question as to what pressures lead us to make a distinction between these two concepts. For when we adopt the sort of solution favoured by Williams we are in grave danger of collapsing the two notions.

In general it is true that the same human being is the same person and the same person is the same human being, but there are odd cases, puzzle cases if you like, where this is not so. And I am not thinking of the wild flights of fancy beloved of writers on personal identity, but of actual cases. It is in these cases that the essential distinction between the two concepts is most clearly seen, so I want to say a little about them.

43. *ibid.*, p66.

The things I have in mind are cases of multiple personality and claimed reincarnation. It is true that most of us derive our ideas about such things from works of fiction, but there are, none the less, actual cases where these claims are made. Williams does recognise the seriousness of the challenge to his position represented by multiple personality, and he devotes a fair amount of time to an attempt to evade its thrust.⁴⁴ He admits that it is possible to identify distinct personalities but says that all this achieves is the individuation of 'particular personalities of Miss Beauchamp, who is bodily identified'. Now, this is a perfectly possible line to take, but there is an alternative. This is to say that 'Miss Beauchamp' is the name of the human being who is, at different times, controlled by different persons. This second alternative is a live option, and we should need to have an argument to give us a reason for preferring one rather than the other. Williams provides none, instead not even considering the second formulation. He ends his piece with the following.

'When Miss Beauchamp was nearly cured, and only occasionally lapsed into dissociation, she spoke freely of herself as having been Bi and Biv. "These different states seem to her very largely differences of moods. She regrets them, but does not attempt to excuse them, because as she says, "After all, it is always myself."⁴⁵

But if he had continued the quotation 'of Sally (Biii), her life and her doings, she knew nothing',⁴⁶ the apparent support that it lends

44. *ibid.*, pp15-8.

45. *ibid.*, p18.

46. Morton Prince, Dissociation of a Personality, New York 1906.

his position would vanish. The person that emerged from the conflict might have accepted some of the previous personalities as herself, but because she does not accept them all, the problem remains with all its force. I leave the problem unsolved for the moment; I at present want only to point out the viability of the alternative to Williams confident dismissal.

Reincarnation claims also present problems. The most spectacular are those produced spontaneously as in the case of Edward Ryall⁴⁷. Here we have a man who makes, and has made from an early age, memory claims which relate to the life of a man who lived in the seventeenth century. But even more startling is the suggestion, lately made by the work of hypnotists like Arnall Bloxham,⁴⁸ that we could all, under the appropriate conditions, produce such claims. Age regression has long been recognised as a technique for the recovery of "lost" memories, and now an extension of this technique produces memory claims which relate not to the early stages of the subject's life, but to another life all together. Of course, there is much resistance to the idea that this is to be explained by saying that the subject is a reincarnation of the former person, but this is not a question that is capable of being settled on a priori grounds. Dogmatic insistence on the logical impossibility of this explanation will find little popular support, and usually turns upon a blurring

47. Edward Ryall, Second Time Round, St. Helier, 1974.

48. D. Arnall Bloxham, Who was Ann Ockenden?, London 1958. This contains transcripts of tapes made by a woman under hypnosis in which she claims to have been, among others, a caveman, a thirteenth century page and a nineteenth century gold prospector.

of the distinction between the concepts of person and human being.⁴⁹ So that I would suggest that any correct account of the concept of a person would have to make room for the possibility of reincarnation, so that the evidence presented by these phenomena can be considered on its merits, rather than being dismissed by the adoption of a dogmatic posture. The cases of alleged reincarnation look very like Williams' view of multiple personality in some ways; one could imagine a subject saying of the former lives he remembers, "After all, it was always myself".

So, now we must ask what the difference between person and human being is. One of the first to make the distinction, and the man who really bequeathed it to modern philosophy, was John Locke. He says of 'person'

It is a forensic term, appropriating actions and their merit; and so it belongs only to intelligent agents capable of a law, and happiness and misery. This personality extends itself beyond present existence to what is past only by consciousness, whereby it grows concerned and accountable; owns and imputes to itself past actions, just upon the same ground as it does the present.⁵⁰

This makes it clear that for Locke, "person" is a social/moral concept. It is concerned with the human being as agent, and in particular in so far as his actions affect others. Thus it is persons that we hold responsible for certain actions, and it is with

49. Geach, in chapter 1 of God and the Soul, tries to refute the notion of reincarnation, but does no more than show that memory claims are not, by themselves, enough.

50. John Locke, Essay Concerning Human Understanding, Book 2, XXVII.

persons that we have social intercourse. A more modern discussion points towards a similar conclusion. Quinton, in the Nature of Things,⁵¹ lists five characteristics which must be possessed by a complete person. These are self-consciousness, that is consciousness of oneself as a continuing entity through time, rationality, free-will, moral status, and a capacity for social relations. The last two are straight from Locke, pointing out that 'person' is a socio-moral term, but these two presuppose the other three. Without a consciousness of ourselves, and others, as continuing through time, it would make no sense to talk of social and moral relations. Moreover, to use praise and blame, it is essential that we think of the recipient as being both free, and capable of rationally deciding upon courses of action. So to regard a human being as a person is to see him as being part of a socio-moral set up. This requires

- (i) human beings are capable of acting
- and (ii) at least some of their actions are worthy of praise and blame.

Now let us return to the puzzles. In the case of multiple personality I think these considerations would suggest that we are dealing with more than one person. Firstly our social relations with Miss Beauchamp as Bi would be likely to be very different from those with Miss Beauchamp as Biii. Also we would be inclined not to hold Bi responsible for the misdeeds of Biii. But this would not be a simple case of diminished responsibility. For we would hold Biii responsible for the misdeeds of Biii. So that while it would seem right to punish Biii for the wrongs perpetrated while Biii was in

51. Anthony Quinton, The Nature of Things, London 1973, pp104-5.

control, it would offend our sense of justice to punish Bi for these wrongs. So that because our social and moral dealings with Bi and Biii are different, it would seem natural to say that we had two persons here, although only one human being.

The case of reincarnation is more problematic. Here the subject does seem to accept a certain moral and social responsibility for the actions of the remembered lives. An examination of transcripts of the tapes made of such claims, (especially Bridey Murphy),⁵² will show the subject making excuses, and even telling aggrandising lies on behalf of ~~their~~^{his} "former self". But we would be more reluctant to ascribe responsibility. If a man today started to make memory claims relating to Hitler, we would not even consider putting him on trial for war crimes. None the less, taking 'person' as a forensic term can help to begin to make sense of these claims. What we need now is a more detailed account of the crucial notion, that of an agent. For since a person now appears to be an agent of a particular type, we must get clear as to what an agent is to understand 'person'.

52. M. Bernstein, The Search for Bridey Murphy, London 1956.

2.4 The concept of an agent

When discussions of the possibility of incorporeal agency come up, the advocate is usually given some such challenge as "how can you prefer 'the incorporeal agent raised the table' to the simpler 'the table rose', when there is no observable difference in the situation that you can point to?" What these opponents overlook is that it is possible to make precisely the same move when dealing with embodied agents. What is it that makes us prefer 'you raised your arm' to the simpler 'your arm rose'? Or, as Wittgenstein puts it

Let us not forget this: when 'I raise my arm' my arm goes up; and this problem arises: what is left over when I subtract the fact that my arm goes up from the fact that I raise my arm?⁵³

The only reason that embodied agents stand better in this than non-embodied ones is that we are all sure that there are embodied agents to ascribe actions to. But why are we sure? And what is an agent?

First we should address ourselves to the answering of Wittgenstein's question. This can be done by asking what we add when we say that a man raised his arm rather than more simply that it rose. What we add, in effect, is a sort of explanation of why it rose. Not a causal explanation of the sort exemplified by 'his arm rose because I jerked the string', but rather we offer a reason for his arm rising. In a sense we plead ignorant as to the cause, because we

53. I. Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, section 621.

have no idea how the movements of our bodies are caused, but in saying that he raised his arm we have already given an answer to the question as to why his arm rose. Further questions can then be asked, such as why he raised his arm, but these are supposed to elicit reasons for his action of raising his arm, rather than for the simple fact of his arm rising. So then what we add is a reason for the event.

Thus to characterise an event as the action of an agent is to offer an explanation of a certain sort. What if we deny that an event is to be characterised as an action? There we say that this sort of explanation is not in order, either because there is a different reason that we can give for the occurrence of the event, or because we insist that the event is a brute fact, with no answer to the question as to why it occurred. And it should be noted that this move would be possible quite generally. For we could say that all movements of human bodies which were inexplicable by "natural causes" were brute facts. This would mean that no ascription of agency to a human being would ever be in order, and the consequence of this would be that there would be no human agents. This move is never (to my knowledge) explicitly made, but it seems to be latent within determinism, in some of its forms at any rate. Here no explanation of the required sort is in order, because causal explanation is held to be exhaustive, and so no ascription of agency is in order. Such an account would leave no room for persons, but this is only to be expected; by making moral notions nonsensical, because things could not have been otherwise, they render redundant forensic terms such as 'person' in any case.

So having tied the concept of an agent, and through it the concept of a person, to a certain kind of explanation we need now to see what would count as a good explanation of this sort. Let us take an example. Suppose Fred drinks a glass of poisoned water. How would we answer the question as to why he did this? Two explanations spring to mind; A) Fred believed that the water was not poisoned and was thirsty, or B) Fred believed the water was poisoned and wanted to kill himself. Two points emerge from this; first that we can only decide which explanation is the better if we know something about Fred's beliefs or goals, and second, and more important, the explanation is only of any use if we ascribe to Fred beliefs and goals. Which has this consequence; because of its essentially explanatory nature, the concept of an agent requires that the agent must be credited not only with capacities, but with beliefs and goals as well. And because a person has to be an agent, this goes for persons too.

So, we have arrived at this position. Bits of the world, most notably the bodies of human beings, are in movement, and we ask why they move as they do. And we find that we can provide an explanation by postulating agents who have the capacities to move these portions of the world, and have beliefs and goals which explain why they move them as they do. So that we need to postulate the existence of certain entities, which we call agents, or persons, to explain certain phenomena. One should not be misled by 'postulate' here, no wavering in the ontic commitment to persons is intended. For electrons, which we are undoubtedly ontically committed to, are equally entities which we postulate to explain certain phenomena, those observed in cloud chambers for example.

This being so, all that we require of an agent is that it be able to affect basically (in Danto's sense⁵⁴) parts of the world, and have beliefs and goals. Now does this mean that an agent has to be corporeal? This question falls into two parts, one concerning the capacities, and the other concerning beliefs and goals.

Why should one think that anything capable of basic action would have to be embodied? Well, what we can basically affect is our body. This could be read so as to come out as whatever we can basically affect is our body. So that if a poltergeist basically affects a jug then that jug is part of his body. (This suggestion is made by Penelhum)⁵⁵. Three things should be noticed about this; first that it trivialises the thesis that all agents must have bodies, by making it tautological. Second it looks rather strange. If the claims of parapsychology are correct it is possible for me to basically affect dice. But do we really want to say that the dice become, however temporarily, part of my body? I would say not and therefore I would want to resist this suggestion, and say that body is a concept of a lower level than agent, to be identified independently of the postulation of agents. To get a grip on bodies we need only have human beings, not agents. And thirdly, in any case, on this interpretation of 'corporeality' there would be no objection to calling God, postgeists and the like, corporeal, provided we do not

54. Arthur C Danto, Basic Actions , American Philosophical Quarterly 2, 1965, pp 141-8. A basic action is one which is done other than by doing something else. Thus lifting a glass is not a basic action, because it is done by raising one's arm.

55. Terence Penelhum, Survival and Disembodied Existence, London 1970, p 42.

identify the agent with the "body". So I would say that we had no good reason to insist that all agents be embodied, at least from this particular argument. A more general argument to the effect that we would never be justified in postulating a disembodied agent would force acceptance of this, so we must now consider such an argument.

This argument turns on the contention that it is necessary to have a body if one is to have beliefs and goals. If correct this would render incorporeal agents impossible. Therefore we must now examine this contention.

One argument in favour of this claim would be from the general materialist position characterised by Geach as saying that "each of us thinks with a material part of himself; specifically, with some tract of the brain - for there is no other part of the body that we have the least reason to regard as the organ of thought."⁵⁶ But this will not work against the view that we can have incorporeal believers and desirers, for believing and desiring are dispositional rather than occurrent notions. I can believe that P and desire that Q without doing anything at all, and do in fact do so for long periods every night whilst I am asleep. It may well be true that I have some belief, the date of a battle perhaps, which will never surface into my consciousness again, because there may be no reason for it so to do. But it will remain true that I retain the belief. So then, believing and desiring cannot be things which are done with

56. Geach, God and the Soul, p 30.

some part of the body, for they are not things that are done at all. So then, what role does this leave for the body to play in believing and desiring?

I suppose the claim would be something like this. That whenever I believe something there will be a trace in, or configuration of, my brain which corresponds to this belief. So, the having of a certain brain state is a necessary and sufficient condition for the having of a belief. (There is no need to push on to an identification of the two.) Now since the having of the brain state is a necessary condition for the having of the belief, having a brain is a necessary condition for having any belief. So that we cannot say that anything we deny has a brain believes anything. I shall first attempt to meet this point more or less head on, using an argument that derives from Jerome Schaffer⁵⁷.

This argument turns on the claim that while it may be true that a body is possessed by a person, it is only a contingent matter that this body is possessed by the person it is possessed by, or any person at all. So that it is a contingent matter that my belief is correlated with a particular state of a particular brain. But, on the other hand, it is a necessary matter that the mental state is my mental state, for it is nonsense to suppose that another person could have the very same mental states that I have. Mine are mine and his are his so to speak. So that if we were to suppose that one can attribute mental states to the body, on the grounds that the brain is in a certain state, mental events which in fact occur to the

57. Jerome Schaffer, *Philosophical Review*, 1966.

person to whom the body belongs could have occurred, but to another person. But since this is not possible, we have a reductio of the idea that mental events are ascribable to bodies. But perhaps we could rescue the materialist thesis by saying that whilst it is not a necessary condition for my having a belief that this particular brain be in a certain state, it is a necessary condition that some brain or other be in that state. So that the argument might seem to do no more than prevent the existence of the brain state from being a necessary and sufficient condition for the existence of the belief, and fails to show the logical redundancy of brains.

For this reason, I ought to try another line of argument. This is to contend that if we were to take the brain state as a necessary and sufficient condition for the belief, we would have committed ourselves to a change in the concept of belief. For when we ascribe a belief to someone we do not commit ourselves in any way as to the state of his brain. And I would suggest that this is a stronger claim than just saying that we don't commit ourselves as to which brain state he is in; we do not commit ourselves to the view that there is anything at all going on inside his head (or any other head) that might be held to correspond to the belief. If someone were to die and I cut his head open and found that it was full of straw, I would not say that I had been mistaken to say that he had beliefs all along. Watching the Wizard of Oz, we naturally ascribe beliefs to the scarecrow, even though we assume, for the purposes of the film, that his head is full of straw. An objector to this view would now say that such things could not happen. Well, no doubt, they are

physically impossible. But this does not make them logically or metaphysically impossible, as they would have to be to make the possibility of believing something turn on the possession of the brain.

But if we were to take the brain states as necessary and sufficient for the belief, we would be in a situation like the one that has developed with dreaming, since the discovery of the correlation with rapid eye movements. People used to say that they never dreamed, on the grounds that they could never recall having dreamt on waking. But now we know better, we might think, for everyone has REMs. But although we now have to say that everyone dreams whether they remember them or not, it would be wrong to say that all the people in the past who denied this were making a mistake. Rather, what has happened is that the old loose concept of dreaming has been replaced by a new, precise, scientific concept of dreaming. No doubt we could effect a similar replacement in the case of beliefs by using the correlated brain states. But that is beside the point here; for it is the old concept of belief that is used when I talk about the need for agents to be ascribed beliefs. So that shifting the talk to the brain states cannot force us to deny that there might be persons without bodies who believe and desire. For these states are logically independent of the body in general and the brain in particular.

All the foregoing shows that there is nothing immediately incoherent about the idea of incorporeal agent. And, indeed, it might be held to suggest something rather stronger, that there is something

incoherent about the idea of a corporeal agent. For it has to be possible to ascribe beliefs and goals to agents, and these things should not, strictly speaking, be ascribed to bodies which are just lumps of matter until animated by an agent. Which means that agents may have bodies, in the sense that they have exclusive basic control over them, but they cannot be identified with them. So that we ought not to see any persons as being corporeal, except in so far as they have an intimate connection with a body. But intimate as this connection may be, it is not identity. Notice this does not lead to a 'ghost in the machine' point of view; the contention is not that there is something incorporeal in a body, but only that the incorporeal person controls the body, in the sense that the body is the part of the world which it can basically affect.

2.5 TWO OBJECTIONS

I want now to try to examine two objections that might be brought against the foregoing account.

The first runs like this: in the above, you have allowed a fit between an agent's wishes and events in the world to be a sufficient reason to say that the events are the action of the agent. But you need more than this; you have to provide some mechanism which can explain how the agent could do it. I want to say two things about this. First that it shows a scientific prejudice in that it takes causal explanation as being the only satisfactory explanation. This is something that I have rejected. The recourse to reason-giving explanation is appropriate only where there is no causal explanation that can be given. So that we never get the situation where reasons conflict with causes, because whenever there are causes we will not give reasons. The choice is never between a cause and a reason, but a reason and a brute fact. The second thing is that I do want more than fit; I require both fit, and the absence of a better explanation. The reason that I do not say that I brought it about that Rubstic won the 1979 Grand National, despite the fact that this event was in conformity with my wishes is that we have a better explanation in this case. That there are persons is not supposed to be more than an hypothesis, - an hypothesis refutable by the production of a better hypothesis. If one were produced I would be forced to abandon "person-talk", but I think that there is no better hypothesis, nor do I expect one to be found, because I believe that there are persons, and they depend for their existence on the supremacy of the account I have offered.

The second objection is similar to the first, and perhaps arises out of it. This is that there is a better explanation here, in that I can give a causal explanation of the movement of the various part of my body by doing a little elementary physiology. So that my arm rises because (causal) my muscles tauten, and my muscles tauten because my brain configurates in a certain way. So that the personal explanation is redundant, because unnecessary.

This objection is hard to meet fully because it is closely akin to the hard headed determinist view that person is an illegitimate notion, that once causal explanation has been exhausted we are at the level of brute fact. But if we once grant there are persons, agents, we can meet it, in the following way. Basic actions are the actions which persons perform, and they are uncaused because persons only enter at the level at which causal explanation ends. But configurating the brain, the above candidate for the initial action in the chain of causes, is not a basic action in the repertoire of any person. If I am asked to configurate my brain in a way appropriate to arm raising or to tauten my muscles in a way appropriate to arm raising I can do it, but only by raising my arm. I have no basic control over my brain. So that brain-configurating, if it is an action, is non-basic, because it can be brought about only by doing something else, typically moving my body. And because basic actions come in where causes stop, irrespective of whether we agree with my account of agency, we cannot therefore see the configurating of my brain as causing my arm to rise. Rather we should see the raising of my arm as having caused my brain so to configurate. The only snag with this is that it seems to commit me to allowing that causes can succeed their effects, as the physiological movements clearly precede the

overt movements. Now, this will seem highly objectionable to some, for there is a long tradition which holds that causes must precede, or at least be simultaneous with, their effects. This is a wide-spread prejudice, but I believe that it is no more than a prejudice. And if people say that such things don't happen I would say that I have produced a counter-example above, and challenge them to think of a way of bringing their brain into the required configuration without moving their body. But, perhaps I should say a little more here.

A.J.Ayer, in Problems of Knowledge gives an interesting discussion of the topic. He says

A more promising explanation is that our notion of causality is derived from the experience of human action; and human action is directed towards the future not the past.⁵⁸

and later:

The only relevant difference that I can find is a difference in the extent of our knowledge. Normally when one tries to bring something about one does not know for certain that it will happen. Not that one's actions would be any the less efficacious if one did know.⁵⁹

But neither of these remarks tells against my position. For we do not set about bringing about something that has already happened when we configure our brain by raising our arm, but something that will have happened when we have done what we set out to do, and which would not have happened had we not set out to do it. If someone asks me if I can configure my brain in a way appropriate to arm raising I will have to say that of course I can, for I can raise my arm, and

58. A.J.Ayer, Problem of Knowledge, London 1956, p173.

59. ibid., p175.

there is a necessary (physically necessary) connection between the two. If you wish to deny that this connection is causal because the "effect" precedes the "cause", you may do so. But you will not in so doing have shown that the configuration causes my arm to rise. For this is plainly false, in that it would not have configured in this way had I not raised my arm.

It may be, however, that some will feel unable to accept causes that follow their effects. I will, therefore, give an outline of a different sort of account, which will suggest how the objection could be met without the need to be committed to causes that follow their effects.

If A is a brain configuration and B is an arm raising, we might allow that B is caused by A. But this time we have to take our reason - our personal explanation - to be an explanation of the series from A to B as a whole, rather than just the arm raising.

This involves no real change in my account of personal action, except to shift the basic action from the simple raising of the arm to the initiation of the whole series.

Which of these accounts one will prefer will depend on one's attitude to causality, but either will serve to meet the doubts raised by the objection.

2.6 THE ACCEPTABILITY OF AGENTS

Having recognised that ontological commitment to agents requires the acceptance of the possibility of a certain sort of explanation, we ought now to see why, as it must be in view of the universal acceptance of agents, the explanation is so convincing.

In general, the acceptability of an explanation is judged by two criteria: explanatory power and simplicity. The more that an explanation can explain, and the less machinery it requires to do it, the more acceptable it is. And agents score very well on both these counts. It is a powerful explanation in that it enables us to explain the movements of human bodies, which otherwise would be inexplicable, and, in view of their frequency and diversity, embarrassing. Also it is reasonably simple; normally by postulating a single agent as having control over each body, we can, by the attribution of a coherent belief/goal set, explain the multitude of highly complex movements that that body makes. It is hard to see how a simpler explanation could account for so much.

So, then the explanation is a good one, but this does not seem to account fully for its universal acceptance. Thus, it would seem, there has to be another factor at work here. At first sight it might seem to be this; we know that there are agents from our own case, and so have no compunction in giving ontic commitment to other agents. This is rather like the old argument from analogy, and like it, it is at a loss to answer Wittgenstein's challenge.

‘‘How can I generalise the one case to irresponsibly?’’,⁶⁰

The truth is however a little more complicated, although a good deal more coherent than this. When we start to do philosophy we have already advanced to a certain age, and have formed a fairly complete picture of ourselves, and it is hard, (for reasons which are not accidental, as will emerge) for us to cast our minds back to how we originally saw ourselves. For this reason we seem to think that things were ever, more or less, thus. But this view is not taken by psychologists, who have taken the trouble to experiment in this area. A psychology textbook says

Ever since William James it has been customary to speak of the infant's consciousness as a 'big blooming buzzing confusion'. The accuracy of this description may forever remain indeterminate. It seems pretty certain, nonetheless, that the infant's consciousness includes no awareness of himself as an individual. As far as we can judge from observation of young children, their mental states can be described as 'It hurts!' rather than 'I have a pain!'.⁶¹

How long this goes on is unclear, but recent work has suggested that 'personaeity' may not develop until the sixth or seventh year.⁶² But by this time he can already perceive both himself and others as agents. So that the move cannot be one of generalisation from his own case, as analogy-style arguments would have it. Which raises the question as to how the move is made. The psychology textbook says this

60. Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, section 293.

61. Ross Stagner, Psychology of Personality, 3rd edition, New York 1961, p183.

62. Carol J Guardo and Janis Beebe Bohan, Development of a Sense of Self-Identity in Children, Child Development 42, 1971, pp1909-21.

Social psychologists...have emphasised the "looking-glass" theory of the self. According to this view, the child does not spontaneously become aware of himself as an object, but learns that others perceive him as an object with certain attributes. Since he acquires his knowledge of the attributes of non-human subjects from his parents and others in his environment, he comes also to accept the image of himself, as reflected in the evaluations of those around him.⁶³

This is particularly suggestive to those in sympathy with Wittgenstein's solution to the other minds problem, because of the striking parallels. In that we can come to apply sensation words to ourselves only because others can apply them to us, and here we become conscious of ourselves of persons only through the perception of us as persons made by others. If this is right, then we do not generate others from our idea of ourselves, but rather the commitment to other minds is an essential precondition for the development of self-consciousness.

If this is so, the universal acceptance of agents is unsurprising. For it would mean that all of us could only develop to a state of self-realisation where it would be possible for us to question whether or not there were agents through accepting that there were. We may, like the solipsist, having attained this, raise the other minds problem, but it is a move which cannot carry with it conviction since we could have no self, or at least no awareness of that self, unless there were other selves. Given that we are created by others not only as human beings by procreation, but as persons as described above, it is senseless and self-defeating to claim that we could exist independently of these other selves.

63. Stagner, op cit., p185.

The position is this; we cannot deny that we ourselves exist, for if we tried to the sounds or inscriptions produced would be no more than inexplicable, unconscious phenomena, and so would not amount to a denial at all. But neither can we say that we exist and others do not, for our existence depends on, and derives from, the existence of others. So that we cannot avoid committing ourselves to agents. The necessity involved here is not psychological - although the account does get support from psychology - but logical. It is only as a member of a community that we can learn to use language, and it is only in language that we can question the existence of the community.

What we can do is to avoid committing ourselves to all alleged agents. So that when someone wishes to explain a particular phenomenon by reference to the action of an agent which controls no body, we can resist this explanation. But we cannot do so by pointing to the inadmissibility of agent-explanation, and so we have to do it by showing why it does not apply in this particular case. This would be best done by the production of a superior alternative explanation, but could also be done by denying that an explanation was in order here. This would involve showing why the explanation lacked the explanatory power and the simplicity generally presented by agent-explanation in the case where we suppose the agent to affect the body of a human being.

But it is difficult to see how this could plausibly be maintained.

In the haunting of Borley Rectory⁶⁴ a number of disparate phenomena

64. For an account of this famous haunting see Harry Price, The Most Haunted House in England, London 1940. A later book, E.J.Digwall, K.M.Goldney, T.H.Hall, The Haunting of Borley Rectory, London 1956, examines the evidence and suggests that it may well have been a confidence trick on the part of Price.

could, if genuine, be accounted for by the postulation of an agent trying to secure Christian burial for a body later found in the back-garden. The explanatory power is as great as any other case of agency. The only problem is that the set of capacities that have to be attributed to the agent are rather more complicated than those attributed to "human" agents because they are not centered on a body. But here the only effective argument, that 'no one could have such powers' is useless because it does no more than beg the question. The fact is that there can be cases where a sequence of events can be explained by reference to an agent with no body, and that such an explanation is as valid on the criteria for accepting such explanations as is any other case of agent-explanation. So that while we could dispute any particular reference to an incorporeal agent, we should have to do so on the basis of the particular merits or otherwise of the explanation as applied to the particular case; there is no short way of establishing the conceptual impossibility of incorporeal agents.

At the beginning of 2.4 I tried to show that the insistence that all non-corporeal activity must be brute fact is not well grounded. Those who deny that incorporeal agency is possible do not provide an alternative explanation, but rather deny that any explanation is in order here. But explanations have to be evaluated on their merits and there is no reason for thinking the whole class of incorporeal agents to be illegitimate en masse.

2.7 Identifying and individuating persons

We are now in a position to tackle the question that has most intrigued writers about persons, how they are to be identified and individuated. In the literature, two things are offered as rival criteria, continuity of the body, and continuity of the personality. And these are indeed the practical ways we use to tell if we are dealing with the same person or not. But I would maintain that here we have no more than symptoms, and neither are in fact constitutive of personal identity. What we need is the real criterion which will be constitutive of personal identity, and will explain how we are able to use the methods that we do to identify persons.

We must remember that persons are agents, beings with beliefs, goals and capacities. From this it would seem that a difference in belief, goal or capacity would be enough to generate a difference in person, and so we could rely on an absence of such a difference to provide us with criterion of individuation. But this is to move too fast; what right do we have to presuppose that we could not have two distinct agents with identical beliefs goals and capacities? The right is given to us in this way; because persons come in at the level of an explanation, we are entitled to reject a worse explanation in return for a better one. Now simplicity is one of our criteria for determining the quality of an explanation, and so if things are in other respects equal we are entitled to prefer the simpler explanation. Now if we were to postulate two agents with the same beliefs, goals and capacities,

we would achieve no gains in terms of explanatory power. If anything there would be a loss, for it would now be unexplained as to why one agent rather than the other performed a given action. But there is a loss in simplicity, in that it means the postulation of an additional entity. Therefore an explanation which denies that two agents can have identical characteristics is better than one which asserts this, and so we have a right to employ the above principle. This right having been established we can have our first shot at formulating a criterion:

(A) Action A and B are both performed by the same agent if they are both to be explained by reference to the same belief/goal/power set.

This is to make progress, but we are by no means there yet. For there are two objections to this. First that the belief/goal/power set changes over time, and so I am unlikely to have the same beliefs today as I had yesterday. And yet I am the same agent today as I was yesterday. Second we may suppose that I have beliefs B_i and B_{ii} and goals G_i and G_{ii} , and action A may be explained by B_i and G_i and action B by B_{ii} and G_{ii} . And yet they are both my actions. Therefore we have to adjust (A) so as to take account of this.

The second objection can be met by some such move as this; if B_i and B_{ii} and G_i and G_{ii} are consistent, then there can be no objection to ascribing the to the same person. But this will produce a simpler explanation, provided the capacities to perform

A and B are not inconsistent, than ascribing them to different agents, and so it is preferable, if possible, to ascribe both A and B to the same agent. The first objection is more serious; we have to be able to account for identity through time, since this is an important fact about persons, since otherwise we would not be able to attribute responsibility and so on. But beliefs, goals and capacities all change, so what are we to do?

The answer will clearly be to propose some principle which will render such changes predictable and coherent. One way of doing this is to make use of the body. We could construct the explanation rather like this. We begin by hypothesising that each body is basically controlled by a single agent. Does this then give a good explanation of the way that the body moves? It does, and also helps to explain why the beliefs and goals change as they do. For with the body comes the possibility of perception, and the great majority of our beliefs are acquired through perception, either directly, as in the case of our beliefs about our immediate environment, or indirectly, through reading or listening to others. Also the body helps to explain why our goals change; often they do so in response to changes in the needs of the body we control.

So now we might try this principle:

(B) If it is possible to ascribe two capacities to the same agent, then do so. If it is impossible, it is necessary to hypothesise two agents.

If we adopt this, we will find that it is indeed impossible to ascribe to the same agent basic control over two distinct bodies. For among the capacities that go along with bodies, are the capacities to form beliefs on the basis of sensory stimuli. But if I give an agent the motive to basically affect a different body, by asking him to, thus altering his beliefs and goals in such a way as to ensure that he would move the other body if he could, then it would be inexplicable why he never did it, except on the hypothesis that he lacked the power so to do. For this reason we are forced to say that each body is in the control of a different agent, since there is this demonstration that if an agent controls one body, he controls no others. But sometimes we will have to postulate two agents controlling a single body, as in the case of multiple personality, because there the movements of the particular body cannot be explained by reference to a single coherent set of beliefs and goals.

This explains why continuity of body and memory seemed like good candidates for a criterion of personal identity. For a difference in body points to a difference in capacity and hence to a difference in agent, and a difference in memories points to a difference in beliefs and hence to a difference in agent. But we can also see that these things are rather a consequence of the difference that constitutive of the difference. So that while they can serve as useful ways of seeing a difference, they cannot be genuine criteria. So that we get this; that if an agent controls a body, that agent can control no other body, so that we might say that identity of controlled body is a necessary condition of identity

of agent. But it is not sufficient, for we require assurance that the set of beliefs and goals which can explain all the actions of that body is coherent before we can conclude that the agent is the same.

But perhaps this is still too loose; for does it not fall foul of the cases of alleged reincarnation, where we have a clear difference of body, and yet a possible identity of person? To meet this we have to add a qualification to this effect, that if an agent controls a body, he can control no other body existing contemporaneously with it. And this qualification is needed really, for the test for sameness of controlling agent mentioned above can only apply between co-existing bodies. Now we can handle the reincarnation problems and say this; that A is reincarnated as B only if there is no better explanation of the memory claims that B makes. And this is in line with the usual practice; attempts to refute reincarnation claims, generally take the form of an attempt to provide a better explanation. This gives us exactly what we want; it makes reincarnation a scientific hypothesis, it allows for its possibility, and it makes its truth turn on the power of the explanation it provides, as we would expect from the essentially explanatory nature of a person.

Therefore all seems to be well so long as agents have bodies, but what of incorporeal agents? How are we to identify and individuate them? The problem is that the capacities of immaterial beings do not fall into such convenient and easily demonstrated

sets as do those of agents with bodies. Penelhum concludes that the task of individuating incorporeal beings is impossible: he writes

it is incoherent to hold that there could be a plurality of incorporeal beings. It might be possible to hold that there cannot be many, but there must either be none or one.⁶⁵

But let us remember what we did with the multiple personality case. There we could not demonstrate a difference in capacity, but relied instead on the impossibility of producing an effective explanation with a coherent belief/goal set. Can we not use the same method here, and abandoning any hope of demonstrating a difference in capacity, look for the most powerful explanation?

This is the situation: we have a number of events which, since we cannot ascribe them to agents with bodies, we wish to ascribe to incorporeal agents. Now if we could do this by postulating a single agent with a coherent set of beliefs and goals, we will do so, but if we find that there is no one set which will explain all that needs to be explained, we will have to postulate others. And so on, until we get a situation where we have explained all that we wish to have explained, and have done it with the fewest possible coherent set of beliefs and goals. Each of these will then have to be ascribed to different agents, and these agents

65. Penelhum, *opt cit*, p108.

will be differentiated by the differences in the beliefs and/or goals that they must have for the explanation.⁶⁶

So that to conclude we have the following ways of identifying and individuating agents.

i. Simplicity forces us to say that no two agents can have the same set of beliefs, goals and powers.

ii. We may find that we cannot ascribe two different capacities to the same agent. This applies particularly in the case of those with bodies.

iii. Where we can detect no differences in capacities, as in the case of incorporeal agents, or those which share control over a body, we try to explain what needs to be explained with the fewest coherent belief/goal sets.

iv. This will yield an explanation which requires a certain number of agents, all of whom will be individuated by differences in their beliefs and/or goals.

66. It is interesting to recall in this context what Aquinas said about differentiating immaterial beings such as angels. Because he held that different things of the same form, such as men, are differentiated by the difference in their matter, he had a problem with immaterial beings. He overcame this by saying that the difference must be one of form, so that angels all differ as to their species, and no species of angel could have more than one member.

The underlying criterion is sameness of beliefs, goals and powers, and these steps just show how we can get a grip on this idea.

And what if Williams makes one of his favourite objections, that this account leaves no room for a distinction between identity and exact similarity?⁶⁷

We could answer that there are many types of thing for which this is so; theorems, hairstyles and games, for example. If we wished to generalise, we might say that this is so for anything to which we assign no location. So there is nothing intrinsically objectionable in the lack of this distinction. So if the theory leads us to this conclusion, there is no reason why we should not willingly embrace it, especially as persons, seen as incorporeal, do not have location.

67. Williams, op cit, p9.

2.8 Three persons in one substance

Having developed this conceptual apparatus, it is now time to put it to work, and to redeem a promise made in the first chapter, to try to give a sketch of an account of the doctrine of the Trinity. Of course, it would be impossible to give a full account in the short space available here, but I hope that the following remarks will be of interest in themselves, and go some way towards showing how this doctrine can be seen to cohere with my remarks elsewhere. The problem is, in essence, to show how we can have three persons of one substance.

The traditional answer to this problem, as represented by the Athanasian creed, is that whilst the persons are identical in attributes and substance, they differ in their relations to one another; whilst the Father is unbegotten, the Son is begotten of the Father, and the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. Thus, the being of the Father derives from none, that of the Son from the Father, and that of the Spirit from both the Father and the Son. But, none the less, the Father is not to be considered as prior to the other two persons; the differences having merely to do with the way in which the Divine Being presents itself. Put like this, the case seems rather like three aspects of a thing, like the three faces of a prism-shaped mountain. Which would leave the question as to why we should call each of these three aspects 'persons'. If the above account of the concept of a person is correct, the answer has to be that each of the three persons has a distinctive goal/belief/capacity set. So we ought to see whether this is compatible with the sort of thing that gets said about the persons of the Trinity.

That there exists a distinction between the Father and the Son is clear from Mark 14. 26

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."

This passage suggests that the Son differs from the Father with respect to goals, beliefs and capacities. That all things are said to be possible with the Father implies that not all things are possible with the Son, whilst incarnate at any rate; that the Son's will is possibly different from the Father's will, a possible difference shown to be actual by the subsequent course of events, shows that their goals differ, and the fact that the Son is ignorant of the difference between his will and that of the Father shows that their beliefs are different. So that if we are to believe what Christ is reported as saying in Mark, as one will be inclined to if one is a Christian, then we have to insist that the Father and the Son are distinct persons.

The case of the Spirit is more problematic, because of the relative unclarity, in my mind at any rate, as to the nature of the Spirit. What then is the role of the Spirit? Firstly, the Spirit is something that is sent from the Father, and dwells within man, and has the capacity to inspire him to utterance. This is the main part it plays in the Old Testament; the reason that the prophets can be said to utter the word of God is that they have the Spirit upon them (Isiah 61.1) and surrender their bodies to be the mouthpiece of the Spirit. As the idea of the Spirit is developed in the New Testament

it is said to dwell not only in a few favoured individuals, but in all believers. Also it is given two new roles; in Romans 9.26. it is said to intercede on our behalf with the Father, and in I Corinthians 12.11 the Spirit is said to apportion its gifts as it wills. All of which is enough to show that the Spirit has goals, beliefs and capacities and so is rightly called a person, and that these are distinct from those of the Father, and so the Spirit is rightly thought to be a distinct person from the Father.

But, what if it is now objected that since all the persons are said to be omnipotent, there cannot be a distinction in their capacities. I think the way to meet this is by seeing clearly that that the constraints on the actions of the Son and the Spirit, which enable us to distinguish them from the Father, are not imposed, but rather self-assumed. God, as infinite, is unknowable, and it is the divine condescension which enables the infinite to become finite and the omnipresent to dwell in each of us, that alone allows God to be known by us. This is what is meant by suggesting that the persons of God are to be treated as rather like aspects; we can see Jastrow's duck-rabbit as a duck or as a rabbit, and in either case we see the whole of the figure. It can be seen as a duck-rabbit only through being seen as one or the other taken together with the knowledge that it can be seen as the other. Similarly, God can be known only as Father, Son or Spirit, but we know the person as God only by knowing too that He can be perceived also through the other two persons. God wants us to be able to know Him, but this can be done only by showing us an aspect of Himself, and this will involve a certain amount of renunciation of power. So that each of the persons are, qua God, omnipotent, but qua person, less than omnipotent in that they have

voluntarily surrendered some or other of their capacities. The distinction between the persons is drawn by us, and so relates to God as we can know Him. The distinction is none the less real, but it exists only because God has made it so, the incomprehensible having made Himself comprehensible. But all these aspects are persons, and they are all God, because it is God that becomes them by the process of self-limitation.

So, then, the analysis of the concept of a person that I have offered can help us to unravel the problems of the Trinity. But it will be remembered that the initial impetus for this discussion came from the problem of how we should analyse statements like 'Jesus Christ is God'. The foregoing suggests the following sort of answer. The 'is' here should be taken as elliptical for something like 'is an aspect of' - which pushes the term 'God' out of a pure predicate position. But we should remember that 'aspect' here is to be taken as exhausting the whole of what it is supposed to be an aspect of, just as both the duck and the rabbit exhaust the whole of the duck-rabbit. We can never see God neat, as it were, but only as one of his persons, but each person is, none the less, the whole of God.

2.9 PREDICATING EMOTIONS OF A BODILESS PERSON

Thus far in this chapter we have shown how we can license the introduction of persons as entities with beliefs, goals and powers. But there is another important aspect of persons to which we ought to give some attention. Persons are also the subject of ascriptions of emotional states, and this is essential if they are to be capable of the more distinctively inter-personal relationships. It is not surprising that God is said to be capable of such emotions as love, anger and forgiveness. What we have to consider now is whether problems arise from the incorporeality of God. That is, we have to see how it is possible to predicate emotions of an incorporeal person.

One move that some people have tried to make is to use the notion of analogical predication.⁶⁸ This is the idea that we sometimes apply the same word to different kinds of thing, and so use it in different, but related, senses. The standard example is 'healthy' as applied to a man and a seaside town. It is argued that psychological predicates undergo a shift in meaning when they are applied to God, although the meaning remains connected with the meaning they have when applied to men. But this is far from satisfactory. Consider the sentence 'whisky is comforting'. Here we have a case of genuine analogical

68. Aquinas propounded this view, deriving the notion of analogical predication from Aristotle. It has been revived since, for example by E.L.Mascall in Existence and Analogy, London 1949, and Jame F Ross in Analogy as a Rule of Meaning for Religious Language, in Kenny (ed), Aquinas, London 1970, pp93-138. The latter writes 'if one wishes to render philosophically plausible the claim of most orthodox Christians that there traditional descriptive statements about God are both literally and meaningfully true one must employ an analogy theory fundamentally similar to that of St Thomas' (p138). I hope in this section to show that this claim is false.

predication. There are similarities between 'the whisky comforted me' and 'the priest comforted me' in that in both cases I end up in a solaced state. But there are also great differences, and it is important to note that the ability of whisky to comfort in no way inclines us to think that it is a person. Now if we say that predications of this kind of God are analogical we are going to end up with an analysis of 'God is comforting' as being rather like 'whisky is comforting' and this is not what we want at all. Because we want to say that the solace that one receives from God is like the solace that one receives from another person, not a bottle. Now then, to resort to analogical predication is to drive in too great a wedge between ourselves and God to allow us to continue to call Him a person other than by analogy. Therefore we have to insist that psychological predicates are univocal whether they be applied to men or to God, or else we will end up equivocating on 'person' as well.

Now if we subscribe to an idealist/empiricist sort of account we will have no difficulties, since it is a sufficient condition for a being's having a particular emotion that he have the appropriate idea (in their sense of the term). If, on the other hand, we subscribe to a behaviourist sort of account we will be in grave difficulties since they place the whole weight on bodily behaviour, and we have no body here. I, however, wish to reject both these accounts on the grounds put forward by Wittgenstein in the Investigations⁶⁹. What I want to do here is to see whether it is possible to accept the Private Language Argument, and to continue to predicate emotions of an incorporeal person.

69. Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, especially sections 243-330. This is the Private Language Argument.

On Wittgenstein's view inner processes stand in need of external criteria.⁷⁰ Thus if we wish to apply a psychological predicate to someone there has to be something which we can point to in order to justify it. These criteria will be sufficient to justify knowledge; perhaps the best way of explaining the relationship between the criteria and the state is to say that the criteria are necessarily good evidence for the state, whereas symptoms are only evidence. The necessity involved here being a semantic necessity.⁷¹

Now the criteria for psychological states most often cited are types of bodily behaviour. Thus my criterion for ascribing ^{anger} to someone might be that he is hurling glasses around the room and yelling curses at the object of his wrath. But notice here that there is no one behaviour pattern corresponding to a particular emotion. Someone else might express his anger in tones of menacing politeness. So a difference in criterion does not necessarily mean a difference in state. But now we have the problem of pointing to the observable signs of God's inner states.

Now there have been religions where this was easy. One knew that one's god was angry because he was throwing thunderbolts across the sky. But this move is not open to the modern Christian who would be reluctant to correlate God's emotional state with any phenomenon of the weather. God's anger is no longer believed to take the form of such petulance. So what are we left with?

70. *ibid.*, section 580.

71. For a good discussion of the term 'criterion' see Peter Hacker, *Insight and Illusion*, Oxford 1972, chapter 10.

We might begin by looking more closely at the sorts of thing that Wittgenstein had in mind when he spoke of criteria. The most obvious sorts of thing are bodily behaviour, the sort of thing that the behaviourists are concerned about. But this is not all that we should take into account. The context is important. This often provides us with the key to interpret behaviour. Wittgenstein writes

I see a picture which represents a smiling face. What do I do if I take the smile now as a kind one, now as malicious? Don't I often imagine it with a spatial and temporal context which is either one of kindness or of malice?⁷²

But context can be more than just a guide to behaviour; on occasion it can replace the behaviour altogether. Thus if I see someone slice into his foot with an axe, and do not believe him to be anaesthetised, I will take him to be in pain even if he were stoically to show no signs of discomfort. Thirdly one can take into account the way one is made to feel by the person concerned. In certain situations one may come to the belief that someone is annoyed with one more because of the effect their actions have on one than by the nature of the actions themselves. This is more likely to be the case the closer two people are to one another. Two old friends may sit together and know one another's state of mind without anything being said or done. And in the limiting case of self-ascription, almost all predication is done in this way. In one's own case criteria are appealed to only rarely, although, if we were very confused we might scrutinise our behaviour to try to see what we were feeling. Thus the third

72. Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, section 539.

element, our reaction, plays a role more or less crucial according to how close we are to the person concerned. In the case of ourselves it is dominant, in the case of strangers it hardly counts at all, and in the case of intimate friends it can be important, although not decisive.

So now we have a wide range of things to look for. Let us see now if any of them are used, or could be used, in applying psychological predicates to God.

First, is there anything which might be said to correspond to the behaviour of the person concerned? Well, we have already shown that it is possible to ascribe actions to God, and here we have a clear parallel with corporeal behaviour, which expresses emotion at least as much as posture, gesture and so forth. The move away from the throwing of thunderbolts to other, more subtle, actions is not so much a shift in the way the deity expresses himself, through action, as a shift in the way in which the divine personality is conceived. The reason that we regard the primitive notion of a god as a flinger of thunder as childishly absurd lies not in the idea of events being expressive of divine emotion, but in the sorts of events that are taken as being so expressive. We would regard someone who displayed his anger in such a petulant way as immature, and we would not think that of God. So we see rather God's anger as being manifested in more subtle and purposeful ways. The Old Testament is full of

examples of this;⁷³ when the Jews anger God He causes things to go against them so that they return to Him.

Next we could consider context. This was far less important in primitive religion, when the signs of the divine anger were taken as a reason to search for what it could be that was angering Him. In modern Christianity, on the other hand, it is of considerable importance, for one will often begin with the context, for example with ~~a~~ ^{knowing} ~~consciousness of having offended~~ ^{that one has acted so as to offend} God, and then seeing in the way things go signs that God is indeed angry, and taking this as a confirmation of guilt.

Thirdly there is the way that the believer himself feels. Theists often talk of being more or less close to God, a state which has a lot to do with their conduct. In prayer, where the believer thinks that he is communicating with God, he may well feel that God has a certain attitude towards him. In prayer believers become conscious of divine wrath and forgiveness through the effect that this communication with God has on them.

In the paradigmatic case all three of these elements will be present. The believer will know that he has done something offensive to God, will feel estranged from God in his prayer life, and see certain

73. For an example see the opening chapters of Jeremiah, especially chapter 2. Earlier in the Old Testament we can see what might be an example of what might be the more primitive conception of God in the story of the Flood (Genesis chapter 6); there God, angry at the sinfulness of man, decides 'I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the ground' (verse 7). After this incident God is conceived as inflicting punishment with the more positive aim of reforming man.

events in his life that go contrary to his will as intervention on the part of God to bring him back to the strait and narrow. In other cases one, or even two, of these elements might be missing just as they may in ordinary predications of human anger. But there will have to be one of them at least there, and this will enable us to get a grip on the idea of God being angry.

This then is a sketch of how the notion of an incorporeal being with an emotional life can be fitted in with an acceptance of the private language argument. I want now to look at what another writer, Phillips, has to say on the same subject. In Concept of Prayer he writes

If we read the words 'I am angry with my people', where the anger referred to is God's anger, we do not understand anger in this context by virtue of the same kind of shared knowledge of what anger means, [as we do in the case of other human beings], but by understanding a common religious experience, namely that of being the object of divine wrath.⁷⁴

There are two things to be noticed here. First, that Phillips puts all the stress on just one of the elements that I distinguished above, namely the third, and second that his emphasis radically changes the situation by introducing an asymmetry between the concept of anger as applied to God and as applied to other people. If we accept this we will be making a great distinction between the idea of a person as applied to God and human beings. I believe that this something that we ought to try to avoid. Let us therefore look more closely at Phillips' arguments. He says that we understand the meaning of

74. On p47.

'I am angry' uttered by someone else because we share an experience with him, namely that of being angry. Is this true? When we are taught to use predicates such as 'angry' those teaching us must be able to recognise when we are angry. It is a consequence of the way we are taught that what we learn when we learn to use 'I am angry' is what situations are appropriate for someone to say of us that we are angry. On this account the role of the actual experience of anger, the internal sensation, is assigned a role of less central importance. It is the third person form that is basic, and our ability to use the first person form is parasitic on the use of the third person form. In a sense we have to reverse the old argument from analogy, and say that instead of understanding the emotions of others on the basis of our own, inner, experience, we learn to understand our experiences by understanding the emotions of others. Now, how does this bear on God's anger? Is it a fatal barrier to our saying that God's anger is on a par with our own that, in Phillips' words, God is not seen, and is logically unseeable, in a state of anger? I think not. Given that we are able to ascribe anger to God in the way I outlined above, we are able to fit God's anger into a form of life based on interpersonal relations. And it is this that is crucial; what we learn when we learn to manipulate the idea of anger, and of emotion in general, is the role that it plays in the life we live and the way it affects our relation with other people. We do not learn that there are certain behaviour patterns which have a necessary connection with anger, nor that there are certain situations which are necessarily productive of anger. Rather, we learn that anger plays a certain part in the life we lead, and that, given this, it will tend to manifest itself in certain types of situation by means of certain types of behaviour. And it is important that the form of

life which gives rise to these emotions is one built on interpersonal relationships. To be angry with something, or to feel that it is angry with you, is to regard that thing as a person. This explains why we laugh at and regard as childish someone who becomes angry with inanimate objects, such as the man who kicks his television set when it will not work. So when we say that God is angry part of what we are saying is that He too is part of this set-up of interpersonal relations. The identity of the concept of anger as applied to God and to man is not secured by similarities in the grounds of predication, and so argument as to whether the grounds are sufficiently similar is quite misplaced. The identity of the concept is secured by what is far more fundamental, the role that anger plays in the form of life of persons. By asserting that God is a person we assert that He participates in this form of life, and hence that He participates in our concept of anger as well.

Which brings me on to the basic difference between Phillips and myself. He does not seem to regard God as a person. This is indicated by his remark that God has no biography.⁷⁵ And it is this that leads him to assert that there is a difference between divine and human anger, rather than any considerations based on His incorporeality. As his claim derives from his views of the eternity and immutability of God, I shall have to digress a little and consider these ideas.

75. Phillips, Concept of Prayer, p48.

The idea that there could be a person who did not have a biography can be quickly disposed of. A minimum requirement for being a person is the possession of self-consciousness, in the sense of a consciousness of oneself as an entity that continues in time, that has a past and a future. Only then is it possible to entertain goals, which refer essentially to the future, and to enter into personal relationships, which invariably contain a measure of development. But to be able to be conscious of having a past and a future, one has to have a past and a future, or at least God does, since He has no false beliefs. Therefore if God is a person, He must have a biography. Also other distinctively personal features such as the ability to act are bound up with existence in time.⁷⁶

But we cannot dismiss Phillips' claims as easily as this, for there are elements in the Christian tradition which appear to support his view. That God is 'outside of time' and that He is immutable are widely held views, and one comes across them in discussions with even the least academic of Christians. But it is interesting to note that the thirty-nine articles make no direct claim to this effect. They say that God is everlasting, and that the three persons of the Trinity are of one power, substance and eternity. There is a tradition in Christian theology which interprets eternity not as existence outside of time, but simply as endless duration, both backwards and forwards in time.⁷⁷ This is the tradition expressed in the thirty-nine articles (and in the Apostles' Creed, where eternal life is referred

76. See Pike, op cit, chapter 6.

77. For a discussion of this, see Pike, op cit., Chapter 9, section 3, and concluding note.

to as the 'life everlasting'), and since it presents no problems for calling God a person it seems to me the one that ought to be accepted, since God's personality is a far more basic element of the Christian faith, and one which has more relevance to the believer, than abstract speculation on the nature of eternity. Moreover, if we abandon immutability, as I hope to show that we should, then timelessness has to go anyway. Therefore I propose that we should reject the idea that God is outside of time, and so Phillips gets no support from it.

But not it might be objected that the timelessness of God is needed to account for divine foreknowledge. This, after all, has traditionally been the strongest support for God's non-temporality. This is not the place to launch a full-scale discussion of this notorious problem, but I will offer a couple of remarks which will indicate why I do not consider that it provides an overwhelming reason for ascribing non-temporality to God.

I would begin by saying that I believe that a proposition is true only if there is something in the present situation in virtue of which it is true. It is reasonable to hold both that God knows this reason, and that it is a reason for the other proposition being true, and hence knows all true propositions about the future.

To those who would object to this on the grounds that it requires that propositions become true, I would reply that it is possible that, as a matter of fact, all true propositions happen to have a reason, known to God, in virtue of which they are true, and that if this possibility is the case, then there is no problem with foreknowledge.

On the question of immutability, we might begin by looking at Plato's argument designed to prove that it has to be the property of any perfect being. His argument runs like this. All change is for the better or the worse; a perfect being could not change for the better, and would not change for the worse. Therefore a perfect being cannot change. This argument fails because its first premise is false; it is simply not true that all change is for the better or the worse.

In a personal relationship with someone who cares for us, we expect the other to rejoice with our joys and to sympathise with our sorrows. Anyone who could survey our triumphs and our disasters with the same bland indifference we would regard not as admirable, but as cold, impersonal and uncaring. And yet this is what an immutable god would have to be like. The most admirable type of person is one who is sympathetic, and who responds appropriately to every situation. As the situation changes, so will the response appropriate to it, and so the admirable person will change with the situation. But such a change is neither for the better nor the worse, although not to change would be to become worse, because an appropriate response would have been replaced by an inappropriate response. So this argument offers no reason to suppose that God does not change.

But it might now be objected that because human fortunes are variable, and because God has to react impartially to so many people, He could not react in this way because it would involve Him in simultaneously rejoicing and sorrowing. But to object thus is to overlook the directed nature of the required response. It is rejoicing with A and sorrowing with B that is needed, and this is different from rejoicing and sorrowing simpliciter. An example will clarify the

situation. Consider this. A mother sees a car containing her two sons crash. She then sees that one is unhurt and the other is killed, and so she rejoices with the one that is unhurt and grieves for the one that is killed. This example demonstrates the possibility of these two emotions co-existing.

The pressure in favour of saying that God is immutable is this; we want to be able to rely on Him completely, and therefore we require that ^{He} ~~he~~ not be capricious. But what we want to do is to rely on God to give a consistent and appropriate response to whatever situation we find ourselves in. And if He is to do this, He must be capable of change.

So the conclusion here is that God does not change in the sense that He always responds appropriately, but does change in the sense that the response that He gives changes with the situation. That is, God's dispositions do not change but the particular predicates true of Him at any one time do. This is enough for us to deny that God is immutable, and to insist that He has a biography.

Therefore we must reject Phillips' claim that God has no biography as inconsistent with what we want to say about Him, and unsupported by any weighty argument.

I want to conclude this section by considering another activity that believers ascribe to God, forgiving. It has been held that here again there are problems because God has no body. I shall quote one writer who sees a problem here, Alston.

When I say 'My mother forgave me' I imply or presuppose that she performed some appropriate overt action, ie some action which could be publicly observed, ie would have been observed by any normal observer who was on the scene. There is no specific action or sort of action that I imply that she performed. It is not necessary that she said 'I forgive you', or indeed that she said anything at all. Her forgiveness may have taken the form of a reassuring smile or a pat on the cheek. But if nothing of the sort took place, then she did not forgive me.⁷⁸

The argument here is that there is an essential connection between bodily action and forgiving, and therefore an incorporeal agent could not be said to perform acts of forgiveness in the same sense as a corporeal agent.

But the importance of bodily action here is only this; that it provides a justification for the claim that we have been forgiven. Our grounds for making the claim, and hence for interpreting the overt action as an act of forgiveness, will be that we needed to be forgiven, and that we felt forgiven, and no longer have a sense of guilt about our transgression. Now consider the case of God. The consciousness of sin, and the feeling of being freed from the burden of sin are still possible here, and indeed are among the more common of religious experiences. Now while it is true that we cannot point to any overt action on the part of God to justify these feelings, we can still justify them in these two ways. First by pointing to acts of God; a Biblical example here would be God's redeeming the Jews from captivity after they have returned to faith in Him. Second,

78. William Alston, The Elucidation of Religious Statements, in Rowe and Wainwright (eds) The Philosophy of Religion, New York 1973, pp455-6.

there is the belief that God will forgive all those who truly repent. So the believer can justify his feeling of having been forgiven by pointing to the fact that he has truly repented. But, is this view of the nature of God itself justified? The way it is justified is this; by the Bible, and the revelation of Christ. In the Gospels we find Christ forgiving the sins of those who repent on numerous occasions,⁷⁹ and declaring that forgiveness follows on repentance. Thus, given the way that believers view God, there is no need for them to have overt actions to justify their feelings of having been forgiven. And so God's inability to provide such overt actions is neither here nor there as regards His ability to forgive.

We might lead on from this specific example to make a more general point. Bodily action is often a means of justifying the predication of an attitude suggested by other criteria. But given the constancy of God's response, the nature of which is indicated by His revelation in Christ, we do not have the same need for confirmation. Given the appropriate context we can feel that we can provide adequate justification for the application of such predicates to God.

But now one can foresee the objection that we have given no reason for accepting what we find in Scripture. But this is beside the point; the question was on what grounds the predications could be made, and the fact is that the Scriptures are used in the making of such predications. The question of whether this procedure is justifiable is part of a different issue; this happens to be the way

79. For an example, see Luke, chapter 7 verse 48.

it is done. And while the criteria may be mistaken, they are none the less clear, and so enable us to avoid the charge that our predications are vacuous because ungrounded. If God exists, He is like that, and it is not necessary to prove His existence before we can even begin to talk about Him.

A comparison might be useful. Country people used to, and perhaps still do, believe in brownies. There were a number of stories about brownies, their habits and whims, and these stories determined what it was proper to say about brownies. Brownies would steal milk, and so if there was some milk missing, one could safely conclude that a brownie had stolen it. But they did not steal bread, and so missing bread had to be explained in a different way. So these stories about brownies explained something about people's lives, although there were alternative explanations, that it was blue-tits that stole the milk, for example. Similarly the Christian experience can be explained differently, psycho-analytically perhaps. And it could be that we might have reasons for preferring these other explanations and reject the Scriptures as mere stories, the way most of us today reject the stories about brownies. But as long as we do not regard them as mere stories they can help give a content to religious belief, the way that the stories about brownies gave a content to the belief in brownies. Indeed, it is the stories that tell us what it is that we are rejecting. But in both cases it is important that the person using the stories regards them as being true. For they have to play the role of determining how certain experiences can be described. If the Scriptures are regarded in this way by some group of speakers, then they can play this role for that group, and distinguish those cases where it is right to say a particular thing of God from those where it is not.

So now we can see that we have enough in the way of external criteria to justify the ascription of emotions to incorporeal beings in general, and to God in particular. We have actions, context, and our reactions, and in the case of God we have more; we can be sure how He will respond in given situations because we have evidence for the nature of His response from His revelation in Christ. So there is no obstacle to our saying that words referring to psychological states are used univocally of God and human beings.

In this Chapter I have tried to show how it is possible for there to be persons who have no bodies. I have shown that the introduction of persons does not require that they be embodied and that emotions may be ascribed to incorporeal persons. This being so, the notion of 'spirit' - a person without a body - is shown to be legitimate and so spirit is shown to be a possible sortal for God to fall under.

3. INTRODUCING 'GOD' INTO LANGUAGE

3.1. The problem stated.

The problem that we are faced with is this: Since 'God' is a referring expression, we have to explain how it can acquire its reference. All the information that we have is a number of descriptions which, as I indicated in the first chapter, have to be interpreted referentially, not attributively. Now in order for a proper name to be introduced into language it is necessary that a confrontation with the named be possible, or have been possible as we saw in chapter 1 - that is, the namer must, in introducing the name be, or have been, in a position to make a demonstrative reference to the named. In the case of descriptions the connection between referring expression and reference is supplied by the bearing of an attribute, but for proper names it is supplied by the participation, as something to which demonstrative reference is possible, in a naming ceremony. So we have the problem, of how God can fulfil this role.

I want to begin by looking at what Crombie has to say about supplying 'God' with a reference. This is an interesting but finally unsuccessful attempt to meet the problem, which he characterises thus:

How can the reference of 'God' be fixed? And if it cannot be fixed how can the expression be treated as a proper name?⁸⁰

80. I M Crombie, The Possibility of Theological Statements, in Mitchell (ed), Faith and Logic, London 1958, pp31-83, p37.

3.2. Crombie's solution.

Crombie summarises his argument like this:

the conception of the divine is indeed in one sense an empty notion; but it is the notion of a complement that would fill in certain deficiencies in our experience that could not be filled in by further experience or scientific theory making; and its positive content is simply a something (we know not what) which might supply those deficiencies.⁸¹

His idea is to treat the traditional proofs of the existence of God not as proofs, but rather as signposts which indicate the area where God is to be found. He says

the formal properties of theological statements, requiring as they do that God be a spirit, leave us unable to conceive what it would be like to be God, but do not leave us without any inkling of the reference range of such statements. It is not a conception, but the hint of a possibility of something that we cannot conceive, but which lies outside of the range of our conception in a determinate direction.⁸²

The proof which he takes as his example is the Cosmological Argument. This, he says, shows that we feel a sense of our own contingency and dependence, and that we take God as an, albeit inconceivable, means of filling the resultant void.

82. *ibid*, p56.

82. *ibid*, p58. The emphasis is his.

This gives a situation rather like this: we gesture in a direction where nothing can be seen and we say that that is God. But of course this will not do. A reason underlying the necessity of the confrontation in a naming ceremony is that we need to be sure that we are conferring the name on a unique object known to us and re-identifiable by us. But we can have no such assurance in the situation outlined by Crombie; we can have no idea as to what lies in the region the proofs indicate, and so it could be many objects, or none, and so we have no grounds for saying that the region contains a unique object. Therefore we have no right to confer a proper name on whatever lies there, and so 'God' cannot justifiably be introduced into language in this way.

Flew makes similar points in his criticism of Crombie:

to the extent that the needs.... [are].... precisely formulated they need to be⁸³ either insatiable in principle or to be met within the universe.

For Flew, the need created by our sense of contingency falls into the first category since, as far as he is concerned, the notion of a necessarily existing being is incoherent. So the region indicated by the argument is necessarily empty. As for the argument in terms of causal explanation, Flew claims we have no reason to look beyond the world. So in this case it is the world which occupies the indicated area.

83. Anthony Flew, *God and Philosophy*, London 1966, p44.

So Crombie's attempt to secure a reference for 'God' fails; it is not enough to point to an area, we would have to know what it contained.

3.3 Towards a possible solution.

To be fair to Crombie, he does recognise the limitations of his account.

Towards the end of it he says

In trying to fix the reference range of theological statements I am trying to fix it for the critic....It is only to him that one would think of trying to answer the question 'what does "God" stand for?' in such a way. To the religious man the natural answer is that 'God' is the name of the being most worthy to be adored.⁸⁴

Here Crombie has touched on a significant point, that the religious man and the non-religious man seem to require different answers here. Why should this be so? Well, the obvious difference between them is that one believes that God exists and the other does not. So let us look at an example where two parties are in dispute as to whether something exists or not, and where one of them is trying to refer to the thing by a proper name. The example I want to look at is based on the play Harvey. The central character in this play is an alcoholic who believes himself to be followed around by a giant white rabbit which he names 'Harvey'. Now, of course, he is the only one who believes that Harvey exists. But notice that the reference of 'Harvey' is fixed by a referential description, in what the namer supposes to be

84. Crombie, op cit, pp66-7.

a situation of confrontation and so it is, for him at least, a genuine proper name. This is shown by the fact that whilst he always says that Harvey is a rabbit, the man could well admit the possibility that he was mistaken and that Harvey was in fact a llama. That is, if there were a llama following him around, he would have named that llama 'Harvey' even though he called it a rabbit, and 'Harvey' would not be a vacuous name. But what is important about the example is that the experience of the man and of those around him is significantly different in that he is suffering from hallucinations. And it is this difference of experience which licenses both his introduction of the name and their rejection of it as vacuous. But notice this: the name is vacuous because there is nothing that he is referring to at all, not because nothing has the attribute he ascribes to it.

Now, how does this bear on the case of 'God'? Perhaps in this way: by indicating that the root of the problem lies in the difference between the believer and the unbeliever.

Therefore the way to proceed towards a solution seems to be this: to try to give an account of the way in which the experience of the believer differs from that of the unbeliever, and to see whether this provides a licence for the introduction of 'God' as a proper name.

3.4 FAITH

So, now we must address ourselves to the question as to what the difference between the religious and the non-religious man is. This is best done by trying to answer the question 'what is it to believe in God?'. It has to be noted that this is very different from an ordinary belief in the existence of something. As Wittgenstein has argued, we should not see this as (simply) belief in a fact:

It has been said that Christianity rests on an historical basis.

It has been said a thousand times by intelligent people that indubitability is not enough in this case. Even if there is as much evidence as for Napoleon. Because the indubitability would not be enough to make me change my whole life.

Here we have a belief in historic facts different from a belief in ordinary historic facts. Even, they are not treated as historical, empirical, propositional.⁸⁵

So what is it that this belief involves? I think the answer is to be found in some suggestive remarks of John Hick's.

There is a sense in which the religious man and the atheist live in the same world and another sense in which they live in consciously different worlds. They live in the same physical environment and are confronted by the same changes occurring within it. But in its actual concrete character... it has for each a different nature and quality, a different meaning and significance; for one does and the other does not experience life as a continual interaction with the transcendent God.⁸⁶

85. L. Wittgenstein, Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology, and Religious Belief, edited by Cyril Barrett, Oxford 1970, p57.

86. John Hick, Religious Faith as Experiencing-As, in Talk of God, The Royal Institute of Philosophy Lectures, volume 2, London 1969, pp20-35, p20.

Hick is suggesting that the believer places an interpretation on his life which the non-believer does not. Faced with a demand to explain why events have gone in a certain way, the Christian may answer "Providence", the pious heathen "Fate" and the unbeliever "Coincidence". All these answers reflect the different interpretations of those that give them. Now the making of an interpretation will rely for its support upon the foundation of some beliefs. The Christian interpretation leans heavily on the presupposed belief that God exists, and perhaps upon others also, but these beliefs lie dead until quickened into a living faith by being put to work in interpreting the world. And it is this which can explain the Wittgensteinian puzzle of what more than mere belief is involved in a religious faith.

So then, if religious faith is the making of an interpretation, we ought to try to get a little clearer as to what is involved in the making of this interpretation. This is best done through the consideration of a couple of examples. We might begin with this question: how does a theist see an object, a tree for example, in a way which an atheist does not see it? The difference does not operate at the aesthetic level, since both can obtain as much aesthetic satisfaction out of the contemplation of a tree as the other. Nor does it operate at the ethical level, for the theistic interpretation does not enjoin any special line of conduct on the man that makes it. But one difference that is certainly there is this; that the theist does and the atheist does not, see the tree as an example of the handiwork of God. And this seeing-as does have certain consequences. Consider Genesis 1.29

And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is on the face of the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be as for meat.⁸⁷

Whether or not this is supposed to be taken as being literally true is beside the point here, because what matters is that these reflections are the fruits of the writer seeing the plants as being the handiwork of God. Which goes to show that the seeing of something as being the handiwork of God is a very different, and more important, matter from the seeing of an artifact as being the work of Jones rather than Brown. For one thing it is, in the case of God, the notion of the thing as having been created rather than made, and for another, so seeing it can lead to the idea of it as a revelation of God's nature, and that it has a particular role to play in the scheme of creation as a whole. In other words the theist invests the tree with a significance which it lacks for the atheist, a significance which stems directly from the seeing of it as being created by God.

As our second example we should take an event in someone's life, say the winning of an Olympic gold medal. It is interesting to consider the various sorts of reaction which are possible to this sort of event. There are those who clearly revel in the sense of self achievement, who consider that they have obtained their goal solely through their own efforts and abilities, but there are also those who claim that the real praise is due not to them, but to their trainers and coaches. These people admit that the success was not really theirs alone, but that they were dependent for it, to some extent at

87. The Authorised Version.

least, on the abilities of others. Then again there are the motives for which they wish for success. Some run for themselves, others for their families, others for their racial group, others for their countries. We are all familiar with these reactions from any number of after race interviews. That none of these is a theistic reaction is, perhaps, a comment on the secular nature of the age we live in. For a distinctively theistic reaction is quite possible here. The theist believes, or should believe, that everything in his life depends on God, and so he ought to see his success as being a gift of God and not as due to his own efforts at all. For it is a Christian belief that without God nothing is possible and with Him all things are possible.⁸⁸ Further, we could imagine the athlete running not for the glory of himself or his nation, but for God, rather in the way in which children at Jesuit schools are instructed to put ‘‘AMDG’’,⁸⁹ at the head of every piece of work. Really, the theist ought to interpret his life in this way; to see that the results of his efforts depends on the aid of God, and to dedicate his efforts to the glory of God. And this would give a distinctively theistic interpretation of the man’s life.

What I am claiming is this: that the religious interpretation is possible, and that it is within this interpretation that the reference of ‘God’ is fixed, since given the ability to act and be communicated with, which lie at the heart of the interpretation, God becomes no more difficult to find than any other person. But perhaps I am moving too quickly here, and so I want to spend some time in discussing the relationship between reference and interpretation.

88. See Matthew Chapter 19, verse 26.

89. For ad majorem Dei gloriam.

3.5 Interpretations and Reference

In this section I want to establish two things: first that we can use an interpretation to fix the reference of certain referring terms, and second that this is in fact a more common situation than might be realised. I want to begin with a quotation from Quine. He is talking about the way in which physicists' particle-words get their meaning.

Molecules and their extraordinary ilk are thus much on a par with the most ordinary physical objects. The positing of those extraordinary things is just a vivid analogue of the positing or acknowledging of ordinary things: vivid in that the physicist audibly posits them for recognised reasons, whereas the hypothesis of ordinary things is shrouded in prehistory . . . To call a posit a posit is not to patronise it. A posit can be unavoidable except at the cost of other no less artificial expedients. Everything to which we concede existence is a posit from the standpoint of a description of theory-building process and simultaneously real from the standpoint of the theory that is being built. Nor let us look down on the standpoint of the theory as make-believe; for we can never do better than occupy the standpoint of some theory or other, the best we can muster at the time.⁹⁰

These remarks about molecules can be compared with some by Godel, when talking about mathematical concepts.

It seems to me that the assumption of such objects is quite as legitimate as the assumption of physical objects and there is just as much reason to believe in their existence. They are in the same sense necessary to obtain a satisfactory system of mathematics as physical bodies are necessary to obtain a satisfactory theory of our sense perceptions and in both cases it is impossible to interpret the propositions one wants to assert about these entities as propositions about the "data",⁹¹

90 Willard van Orman Quine, Word and Object, Cambridge, Mass., 1960, p22.

91 Kurt Godel, Russell's Mathematical Logic, in P.A. Schlipp (ed), The Philosophy of Bertrand Russell, 3rd edition, New York 1963, pp123-53, p137.

Now, what molecules, numbers and God all have in common is that they are none of them directly observable. Rather we have developed a certain theory and find that the theory requires us to posit the existence of certain objects which are required by the theory. It is the theory that gives these objects their sense, and the truth of the theory which validates assertions of their existence. The situation is very like the one we encountered in chapter two when dealing with persons, and this should be unsurprising when we remember that it was from this that the sortal concept under which God falls emerged.

If we accept this, we shall be in this position; if we introduce a theory, or make an interpretation, we shall in so doing commit ourselves to the existence of those objects which the theory requires -- always assuming that we wish to treat the propositions as being literally rather than metaphorically true. Now we have to ask the question of how the theory enables us to fix the reference of such terms as stand for these posited entities.

To do this I want to approach fairly indirectly through consideration of an example which might show how the element of interpretation is more pervasive than might at first be realised, in that it is not confined to necessarily unobservable entities, but reaches up to observable ones as well. It will also enable us to use a somewhat simpler model which will make the issues involved somewhat more clear. We can begin with another quotation from Hick

We are so familiar with forks that we normally recognise one without encountering even enough difficulty to make us notice that we are performing an act of recognition. But if the fork were sufficiently exotic in design I might have occasion to say that I can recognise the thing before me on the table as a fork . . . and going further afield, a Stone-Age savage would not be able to recognise it all . . . he would not have the concept of a fork with which to identify it as a fork . . . to recognise or identify is to experience—as in terms of a concept.⁹²

When I sit down to dinner, I am confronted by a number of variously shaped pieces of metal. With the practised eye of an experienced diner, I can interpret these various pieces of metal in culinary terms, seeing one as the soup spoon, one as the fish-knife, one as the dessert knife. Because I am so practised it may not occur to me that I am doing any interpretation at all. But I am. So too, with chess pieces. I interpret the variously shaped pieces of wood as being the king, bishop, pawn, etc., but here I may, with modern sets, experience some difficulty. I may not know which is which, and indeed may even see the bishop as a queen, with disastrous results for my play.

Now, it is only with the introduction of "cutlery" language, and the interpretation that it enshrines that we start to get such objects as knives and forks at all. This is the key to the notorious problem of the relation between, for example, a fork and the matter which constitutes it. We should not say, as it is tempting to do, that a fork is a consignment of metal having a particular form. Rather a fork is a consignment of metal seen as being a fork, that is interpreted in a certain way in accordance with the rules for the application of the cutlery-interpretation.

92 Hick, Religious Faith as Experiencing-As, pp24-5.

Anything which involves a measure of seeing-as, of interpretation, and there are those who would claim that this is to be extended to any act of perception whatsoever,⁹³ is the ordering of experience with regard to some theory or other, and will involve commitment to the concomitant entities. The interpretation will be made in accordance with certain rules - this is important for interpretation is essentially a sort of rule governed practice. These rules will supply criteria as to what is to count as being an instance of the theory-dependent entities. Thus it is the rules that govern the interpretation involved that fix the sense of the referring expressions introduced by the theory. Which means that to show that reference of 'God' can be fixed we have to show that the practice of religious interpretation makes sense, that it is such a rule governed practice, and that its rules are coherent rules.

Of course, it must not be forgotten that 'God' is supposed to be a proper name whereas the other interpretations introduce common nouns. But this does ~~not~~^{not} affect the situation crucially. It is just that the monotheistic interpretation introduces a class of being that has only one member, and which can therefore have a proper name conferred upon it.

It is interesting to look at the consequences that this view has for those who resist the interpretation. One view that has been put forward in recent times is that unbelievers cannot argue with believers because neither can make sense of what the other is saying, and on

93 See G.N.A. Vesey, Seeing as Seeing-As, in Swartz (ed), Perceiving, Sensing and Knowing, New York, 1972, especially p72.

some views of the interpretation of the sense of theological terms that I have outlined above, this might seem to be supported. To quote again from Quine,

Unless pretty firmly and directly conditioned to sensory stimulation, a sentence S is meaningless except relative to its own theory; meaningless intertheoretically.⁹⁴

On this view unbelievers simply could not, as a matter of logic, understand religious utterances, and those who subscribe to one religion could not understand what those of another persuasion were saying.

Two points must be urged against this. First that it is not necessary to subscribe to an interpretation in order to have a mastery of the rules according to which it is made. Thus it is perfectly possible for an unbeliever to have a knowledge of what it is that believers count as an experience of God, and so understand them when they talk about such experiences, whilst denying that they are right so to count such experiences, and so contradicting their assertions. Second, we need not accept Quine's account of the matter, even for those who hold to different theories. Hartry Field⁹⁵ has argued that terms do not usually become meaningless when viewed from the standpoint of another theory, but rather their meaning shifts so that a term of one theory, may partially denote a term of another. The example he uses is that of 'mass' which refers to something different today from what it did within the framework of Newtonian mechanics. Not that Newton's

94 Quine, op cit., p24.

95 Hartry Field, Theory Change and Indeterminacy of Reference, Journal of Philosophy 70, 1973, pp462-81, especially 474ff.

term has become meaningless, so that we are no longer to understand what Newton was saying, but rather that his term partially denoted both our modern ideas of mass, without fully denoting either. This kind of exposition has its obvious attractions for someone trying to fix the sense of a term like 'God', for now when we are dealing with different religions we are not forced to choose between the dilemma of the term that one religion uses to denote its deity either having the same sense as 'God' or a completely different sense, but can rather make use of Field's notion of partial denotation in order to bring out both the connections and the points of difference between the two faiths.

So then, my contention is that an interpretation based on rules for the ordering of experience can enable us to fix the reference of such terms as are supposed to refer to entities posited for the sake of the interpretation. Now it remains to be shown that the religious interpretation is such a rule-governed practice.

3.6 Religious Interpretations and Criteria

In the second chapter, I showed how it was possible to predicate distinctively personal attributes of God, and in so doing I showed how part of the religious interpretation was possible, in that it was done in accordance with rules. In this section I want to look at another aspect of the religious interpretation, namely claims to experience God. This is the crucial part of the interpretation for our present purposes, for it is this experience which licenses the introduction of 'God' as a proper name.

The usual criticism that is levelled at claims of the form 'I have had direct experience of God' is that these collapse to statements of the form 'I seem to have had a direct experience of God'. Thus C B Martin writes

It is quite obvious from these examples that the religious statement 'I have a direct experience of God' is of a different status from the physical-object statement 'I see a star' and shows a distressing similarity to the low-claim assertion 'I seem to see a star'.⁹⁶

Now, if this is correct, then it is going to be the case that here whatever seems to me to be right is right, which will mean that it is impossible to speak of being right here. Which means in turn, that such experiences are not governed by rules, and so cannot form part of the reference fixing interpretation that I require. Which means that I need to show a relevant difference between the religious claims and the low claim assertions about psychological states of mind.

96. C B Martin, Religious Belief, New York 1959, p75.

The difference is this: that religious statements are, whereas psychological claims are not, corrigible, both by oneself and by others. It must be remembered that the position that Martin is attacking makes a rather different use of religious experiences from the one I ^{defending} am. I want to use them only to help fix the reference of 'God' whereas the view that Martin opposes tries to use them to prove the existence of God. Now, whilst I would agree that as far as establishing the existence of God is concerned, these statements are of no more use than 'I seem' statements, they should not be assimilated to them. For there are ways in which claims relating to experiencing God can be assessed, so that there is an ever present chance of making a mistake, which there is not in the ordinary run of 'I seem' claims, if we discount slips of the tongue. And where there is the possibility of this sort of mistake, we cannot hold that we are dealing with purely subjective issues.

Now we must ask what the criteria by which these claims are assessed actually are. A point to be noticed here is that religion is never a solitary activity. Even in the days when becoming a hermit was a way of expressing religious faith, the hermit originated within a religious community, and his becoming a hermit was an outgrowth of the beliefs and practices of that community. The community plays an important role in religion because it is the community that provides the criteria that determine the religious interpretation. This being so what we need to do is to begin by looking at one community and seeing what the criteria that operate there are.

In the seventeenth century a number of non-conformist Christians wrote spiritual autobiographies,⁹⁷ which were accounts of the workings of God in their lives. As these provide explicit instances of the sort of interpretation that I have been talking about, they seem a good place to look for criteria used in the making of these interpretations. The one I want to single out for some detailed examination is Satan's Methods and Malice Baffled, by Hannah Hatt⁹⁸. This is especially interesting for our purposes because it recounts a series of experiences which her friends regarded as delusive, and which she herself came to regard as delusive by the time of writing the book. Thus it is an account of just the sort of mistake in religious interpretation that I mentioned above, and the attempts of her friends to persuade her of the delusive nature of her interpretation will give us insight into the criteria employed by this particular community.

The efforts at persuasion are of three main types. First there is the appeal to what is taken to be the Word of God, in this case the Bible. Second there is reference to her conduct, and third appeals to authority.

97. These writings are of particular interest for the matter under consideration for a number of reasons. First they are the product of a time when the nature of religious experience, and the possibility of diabolic delusion, were a matter of obsessive interest, and second they are the products of non-professional writers and so offer an insight into the thought of ordinary members of the non-conformist communities, as opposed to the more theoretical ideas of theologians. I am grateful to my friend John Stachniewski for drawing my attention to these works, and for suggesting a list of titles.

98. Hannah Hatt, formerly Hannah Allen, Satan, His Methods and Malice Baffled, London 1683.

When she first becomes convinced that she is damned, - all the experiences she takes to be messages from God concern this point - it is in a particularly striking way. She hears a clap of thunder directly over her bed and hears two youths in the yard outside singing, and she takes them to be devils singing for joy at the capture of her soul. Then a text comes into her head, seeming to have been sent from heaven 'there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin'. She says

And this delusion remained with me all along, that by the miracle of the Thunder and the Voice and the Scripture God revealed to me that I was damned.⁹⁹

On telling her aunt, she immediately received scriptural reproof; her Aunt says that his cannot have been a genuine message from God because there is nothing of the sort in the Bible. But Hannah refuses to accept this, and retorts that this shows only that her case has no parallel, and that she must be more wicked than any previous sinner.

What does this show? That in the community at large, religious experiences are to be measured against the experiences reported in the Bible, and if it has no parallel there it cannot be veridical. Hannah, however, rejects these attempts to find a parallel; in her deluded state she puts herself outside the community by refusing to accept the criteria of the community. Notice that she cannot really be other than deluded here, for she continues to use the

99. *ibid.*, pp21-2.

language of the community whilst denying it its grounds for acceptance. When she came to write the book she had returned to the standpoint of the community and realises that she was wrong not to accept the argument of her Aunt. Her refusal she attributes, from within the community, to the malice of Satan.

Among the non-conformists, the Word was, in general, the final arbiter. The same sort of reasoning can be found time and time again in John Bunyan's Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners.¹⁰⁰

But importance is not only attached to the Word itself, but also to the way in which one can come to light upon the Word.

Hannah Hatt reports how she was carelessly turning the pages of the book and

lighted directly on a place that treated directly of my case, which it pleased God to bless that I was so much comforted and strengthened that I recovered for that time from my despairing condition¹⁰¹

Bunyan is also full of such chance lighting on texts.¹⁰² These texts are empathised with the justification that the apparent chance is only apparent, and that it is really God that leads one to the text. Viewed in this light the practice of searching for

100. John Bunyan, Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners, edited by Sharrock, Oxford 1962.

101. Hatt, op cit, pp5-6.

102. For an example, see Bunyan, op cit, paragraph 47, p17. But in Bunyan's case it is more usual for him to simply think of a text without apparent reason. For an example of this, see paragraph 76, p25.

leadings in the Bible much in the manner of sors Vergilis¹⁰³, becomes more rational. If one really believes, as a cornerstone of one's interpretation of the world, that God directs even the most trivial of actions, then it is reasonable to see apparent chance happenings as pregnant with a divine message.

Thus the first criterion for the assessment of religious experience among this community was scripture. If the event is in conformity with what can be found in scripture it is veridical, and not otherwise.

The second criterion is conduct. Hannah has declared that she was a sinner of no trivial sort, but unparalleled in her sin. Which gave rise to the following conversation, reported in her book.

I would say that I was without Natural Affection, that I loved neither God nor Man; and that I was given up to all manner of wickedness with greediness; We see no such thing by you some would say; I would Answer, I, but it is in my heart; Why doth it not break out in Act? say they, It will ere long, said I.¹⁰⁴

Here the idea of faith (and the lack of it) showing itself in works is clearly brought out. This is the element that most philosophers of religion have tended to concentrate on. They say that we accept, for example, the experience of St Paul on the Damascus Road as veridical, not due to anything intrinsic in the

103. A good, if fictional, description of this practice is in Adam Bede by George Eliot, where it is the habitual recourse of Dinah Morris at times of decision.

104. Hatt, op cit., p58.

experience, but rather due to the difference that it made in his life. And not just because it made a difference, but because it made the right sort of difference. Now, in the case of Hannah, it was evident that she was wrong to claim that she was the greatest of all sinners because her conduct gave the lie to this. But her conduct also showed that her experience was not of God, for the difference that it made to her life was to lead her to a state of despair, and despair is counted as a sin. Now, God would not lead anyone into sin, and so because the experience did lead her into sin, it could not originate with God. Now all this rests on an appeal to some conception of God, and so we have to ask from where this prior notion of God is derived. The answer is from Scripture, and ultimately from the acceptance of Christ as God revealed in man. Thus the effect of a veridical experience ought to be to make the person concerned more Christ-like. Bunyan speaks of some women who display

a very great softness and tenderness of heart which caused me to fall under conviction of what by Scripture they asserted.¹⁰⁵

Here what seems to happen is that he recognises the spirit of Christ in them, and so accepts their interpretation of Scripture on the basis of the testimony of their lives. So that we can see that conduct is important not only in particular deeds, but also in the whole bearing and manner.

105. Bunyan, op cit., paragraph 99.

Which brings us to the appeal to authority - authorities in this community being recognised by the way they lived. This is not of so much importance in Hannah's account, but there is one instance of it. She writes

He (her cousin) asked me if I would believe better of myself if Mr Baxter [Richard Baxter, the eminent non-conformist preacher] told me my condition was safe, and I answered yes.¹⁰⁶

What is of particular interest here is that even in her deluded state, this is the one criterion that she does not reject.

So, from reading of this book we can see that there are three main tests which are applied to candidates as experiences of God in this community. There is the correspondence of the experience with those to be found in the Bible, the conduct of the person concerned, in particular the way their lives change as a result of the experience, and the opinion of those held to be authorities on the matter.

It would now be interesting to compare the conclusions we found from Hannah Hatt with the writings of another experiencer of God from a very different religious tradition, St Teresa of Avila. Her book, the Interior Castle,¹⁰⁷ describes the stages of prayer through which a soul goes on its way towards union with God. But scattered throughout the book are warnings against taking an

106. Hatt, op cit., p56.

107. St Teresa of Jesus, The Interior Castle, translated by the Benedictines of Stanbrook, revised and edited by the Very Rev Prior Zimmermann, London 1921.

experience which is not from God as being from Him, and ways in which one can determine whether the experience is from God or not. So what the saint is doing is explicitly offering criteria for the assessment of one's religious experience. These criteria, we find, correspond very closely with those that we found with Hannah Hatt, although the emphasis is sometimes rather different. Teresa insists far less upon the Word as the ultimate arbiter, but when she does refer to it it is in very strong terms. Talking about locations she says

Take no more notice of any speeches you hear which disagree with the Holy Scriptures than if you heard them from Satan himself..... Always resist them: then they will¹⁰⁸ leave you, for they have very little strength of their own.

Again there is the weight laid on conduct:

The devil sometimes offers counterfeits of the graces I have mentioned: this can be easily detected - the effects being the exact contrary of the genuine ones.¹⁰⁹

and again

the effects in false raptures are very different¹¹⁰

108. *ibid.*, Sixth Mansion, chapter 3, paragraph 5 (p176).

109. *ibid.*, Fourth Mansion, chapter 3, paragraph 11 (p116).

110. *ibid.*, Sixth Mansion, chapter 4, paragraph 22 (p197).

and again

If such favours made you careless, it would prove that they were not from God as they did not leave the results I described. It would be well for you to tell your case, under seal of confession, to some thoroughly qualified theologian (for that is the source where we must obtain light) or some highly spiritual person.¹¹¹

This last quotation also makes mention of the use of authority, especially the authority of some institutionally qualified person, like a confessor. This fact gets, as we might expect, a good deal more stress from Teresa than it did from Hannah. Teresa writes

The devil's deceptions are more dangerous; but if the foregoing signs are present we may feel fairly confident that these locutions are from God, though not so certain but that, if they refer to some weighty matter....we should consult some confessor who is both learned and a servant of God.¹¹²

These considerations adduced from two very different religious women should be sufficient to exempt the experience of God from the charge that here whatever seems to be right is right. There are criteria here, well established within various Christian traditions, and differing more in emphasis than substance between them. Martin, however, acknowledges this but goes on to say

But now, what more has really been accomplished by this? To say that the source of these experiences is God and not Satan in the absence of further criteria reduces to saying that these experiences have profound effects on one's character, attitudes and behaviour. And why should an atheist deny this?¹¹³

111. *ibid.*, Sixth Mansion, chapter 7, paragraph 10 (p234).

112. *ibid.*, Sixth Mansion, chapter 3, paragraph 18 (p181).

113. Martin, *op cit.*, p 93.

But really it is only the second sort of criterion that so reduces. The demand for conformity with Scripture and the appeal to authority make no sense from the standpoint of an atheist. And in both cases we have looked at, it is these sorts of criteria that receive the most stress. Of course, such experiences cannot be used to demonstrate the existence of God, but they can be used to fill out what it means to believe in God. The interpretation of experience which helps to constitute belief in God is governed by rules and these rules then show what is meant by 'God'. So that we have got what we were looking for from St Teresa and Hannah Hatt, namely evidence that the religious interpretation follows rules, and does not collapse into pure subjectivity.

This account of religious experience also helps to clear up a point about religious experience which has often been fastened onto by atheists and which has sometimes caused believers some concern, namely why it should be that what is experienced is so closely linked to the religious tradition that the experiencer accepts, why it should be only Catholics who see the Virgin Mary, for example. On my account of the matter, this is both natural and inevitable, for since it is the religious tradition that determines what one can count as a religious experience, any experience which is counted as religious has to be articulated within the terms of the tradition. Only Catholics see the Virgin Mary because only for a Catholic could anything count as such an experience, for it is this tradition alone which has the criteria necessary to validate such an experience. So that this point, far from being a problem, is actually demanded by my account of the matter.

I began with Martin's dichotomy between objective and subjective statements. I hope that what I have said in this section will have shown that dichotomy to be false. Religious statements are not subjective because they are regulated by objective criteria, but are not fully objective, because the criteria can always be rejected.

3.7 Fixing the Reference of 'God'.

Now we are in a position to see how exactly the reference of 'God' is fixed. To believe that God exists is to interpret the events of the world, and of one's own experience in a particular way. This interpretation will carry with it criteria for its correctness supplied by the religious community of which the believer is a member. By accepting the belief the believer accepts the criteria and these criteria are sufficient to determine the referent of 'God'.

But some questions remain. How does someone recognise God when and if they encounter Him, how do they re-identify Him, how do we know that two different people can be said to encounter the same god? The answers to all these questions are implicit in the foregoing, but it is perhaps worthwhile to spell them out in some further detail. A person learns the use of the word 'God' in the first instance through being told about Him, that is by being told of his attributes. But it is important that he also realise that it is possible to encounter God, to have experience of God as well. It is this second point which is important both from a logical point of view, as it is that which enables 'God' to have the status of a proper name, and from a theological point of view, since it is this aspect which is largely what distinguishes a religion like Christianity from one like Deism. It has long been said that 'the god of the philosophers' is not God, as understood by religious people. This is because the philosophical proofs of the existence of God have tended to concentrate only on God as described by predications of His traditional attributes. But such concentration tends to obscure the nature of God, for it is essential to a realisation of the sort of being that God is to grasp

that is possible to experience Him. It is this possibility that enables one to take the correct view of the relation of 'God' to the descriptions which describe 'God'.

Once this possibility is accepted, then we can use the criteria to settle the doubts mentioned above. Believing in God, one will accept that if an experience satisfies certain criteria, then it is an experience of God. So that if one has an experience which does satisfy these criteria, then one is entitled to believe that it was God that one experienced. Similarly if one subsequently has another experience which also satisfies these criteria, then one can say that one has met God again. Equally, the criteria can be applied between different people to ground saying that they have encountered the same god. There is a strong analogy with sensation words here. In that case also the person in isolation cannot re-identify his sensations. What gives the sensation words their meaning, and what gives objectivity to their use, is that they are bound up with the lives of a community of people. So too in the case of God, the difference being that whereas in the case of sensation we are dealing with a linguistic community, in the case of God we are dealing with a religious community.

But this leaves us with two related problems. One concerns conversion experiences and the other the assessment of the experiences of other traditions. In the case of conversion it is the experience, taken as being an experience of God, that leads to the acquisition of faith and so the adoption of the criteria by which I claimed the experience is to be judged to be an experience of God. In the case of the other traditions we will sometimes wish to allow these other traditions veridical experiences of God, and yet they do not, we may assume,

share identical criteria with our own. Both these points can be accommodated on my account, but it is worth while to show how this is to be done.

To take conversion first. The alleged problem is that it is the experience that leads to the adoption of the criteria and so cannot be said to be assessed according to the criteria. But this overlooks the fact that these criteria will be known to, although not yet adopted by, the person who has the experience. Therefore he will be capable of assessing the experience by these criteria, although he may reject the conclusion along with a maintained rejection of the criteria themselves. So that he may have an experience and be able to say that if he were a Christian, then he would have believed that experience to be an experience of God, but that he does not believe this because he believes the criteria to be mistaken. But he could say, and if it is a conversion experience he will say, that it was an experience of God, because he no longer rejects the criteria because the experience convinces them of their truth. For the convert to experience God in his conversion experience, it is not necessary for him to accept already the criteria, all that he needs is knowledge of them. And this knowledge it is reasonable to suppose that he has. This account of the matter is supported by the empirical fact that people are invariably converted to a religious viewpoint that they are familiar with, a datum that would be inexplicable if the interpretative element were absent.

The second problem is both more serious and more interesting. This is because it links up with another problem which I have not so far looked at, how widely we are using the term 'religious community'. Is a community exhausted by a faith, a sect, or is it even wider than this? It is not, however, particularly hard to deal with. The situation is this: suppose that I am a Methodist listening to a report of the religious experience of a Catholic, or a Jew. How am I to assess it? Clearly I will use my own criteria to evaluate the experience, and it could be that these criteria will validate it, or it could be that they will not. If the report in question concerns, say, a vision of the Virgin Mary, then it is likely, while valid on the criteria of the Catholic, to be invalid on the criteria of a Methodist. So that I will regard this experience as delusory. On the other hand if it is an experience of God that is the question it is likely to be acceptable on both sets of criteria. From which it would be fair to infer that whilst the Catholic and the Methodist are members of different religious communities, they can both be said to worship God.

This then avoids the problem of us having to say that because of differences in criteria no two religious communities can be said to worship the same god. If the experience of one community is validated by the criteria of another community the first may be said to worship the same god as the second. Notice that this relationship need not be symmetrical, nor transitive. It might well be that Christians would validate the experiences of, say Jews, but not vice versa. So

that whilst as far as Christians are concerned both they and the Jews worship God, this might not be the case as far as Jews are concerned. Or, given three communities A, B and C, A may say they worship the same god as B, and B say they worship the same as C, but A deny that they worship the same as C. This set up, whereby all assessment is done from the standpoint of a particular faith, enables us to give clear and consistent answers without needing to enter the vague areas consequent on a comparison of the various sets of actual criteria. For the criteria actually used to validate the various experiences do not come under consideration; all that is required is that the answers tally.

Perhaps this is the place to try to dispel a fairly common misconception. One often hears as challenge made by atheists the question as to why it is only believers that experience God. This can be answered in the following way. When we have an experience it stands in need of interpretation. In the case of seeing, when we see an object we have to interpret what is before our eyes, taking into account such things as the position of the object relative to our eyes, our knowledge of perspective and so on. Emotional experience also stands in need of interpretation. If a boy waiting for his girl-friend feels a violent churning in his stomach he may take it as a manifestation of his love for her, or as a result of the prawn vindaloo that he ate at lunch time. This is the sort of interpretation that we need to look at here.

For this sort of interpretation always takes place against a background of presuppositions; in the last example the boy in question must be sufficiently romantic to believe that love can make you feel ill. Anyone who did not share this presupposition would look no further than the curry. The message is clear: the interpretations which one can put on one's experience are limited by the presuppositions that one has.

Now, look at the case of God. In order to interpret an experience as an experience of God, one has first to believe that this is a possible experience. Which means that it first has to be believed that it is possible that God exist. This is in itself enough to explain why non-believers never see any of their experiences as encounters with God. It is not necessary that their experiences differ in any way, because their presuppositions already limit the range of interpretations that they are prepared to make, and exclude the religious interpretation. When we add to this that it is only through the subscription to the beliefs of some religious community that one has the criteria one needs to count an experience of God, the failure of the non-believer to recognise an encounter with God is fully explained. It is only through belief that one can acquire the presuppositions and standards required to interpret experience in a religious way, except as in the case of conversion described above.

Finally, I should mention that it does not affect the issue as to whether the above account of how the reference of 'God' is fixed is true if one believes that the interpretations made by the religious communities are false, although this would have the consequence that one would thereby believe that God did not exist. If the interpretation is wrong, then it is true that nothing is referred to, and so no reference is provided for 'God'. But another consequence is the falsity of theism, and if theism is false then our failure to fix the reference of 'God' is unsurprising since this means that 'God' is vacuous. But if theism is true, which is to say that 'God' really does refer, then the interpretation is right, and so it can be used to fix the reference. That the correctness of the interpretation and the ability to fix the reference of 'God' stand and fall together is not accidental, and should not be surprising.

Now that I have removed these possible sources of objection, I can restate the account I suggest. Religious faith is an interpretation, which requires that a certain entity, God, exist, if it is true. So that to accept the interpretation is to believe that God exists. And if you accept the interpretation, you accept the criteria, and these criteria determine what this entity is, and so what 'God' refers to.

4. CONCLUSION

In this thesis I have been defending the view that 'God' is a proper name of a spirit. There is, I hope, nothing radical about this since it is intended to represent the natural view of Christians. It is, however, a view that has come under attack recently from a number of directions. In the first chapter I tried to show why we should regard 'God' as a proper name, and that none of the arguments against doing so were conclusive. In the second chapter I disposed of a number of arguments designed to show that the notion of a spirit is incoherent, and in the third I showed how the reference to 'God' can be fixed, and the term introduced into language. I have not sought to prove that God exists, but merely that the account offered by theists need not be incoherent. (Although, of course, some theists do offer incoherent accounts, those who claim that God is a timeless person, for example.) The demonstration of coherence is, I believe, the most that philosophy can achieve in this area; proof is impossible. And there is a good reason why this should be so, since the crucial encounter experience is a matter of interpretation, and interpretations can be plausible or persuasive, but never coercive. If two interpretations are possible, then neither can be proven.

So I have not set out to show that theistic belief is true; what I set out to show, and hope that I have succeeded in showing, is that it is at least respectable, in the sense of being free from internal self-contradiction. Or, at least, that it is free from such self-contradiction as regards the areas I have considered here. And it is in these areas that I believe such demonstration was most needed.

