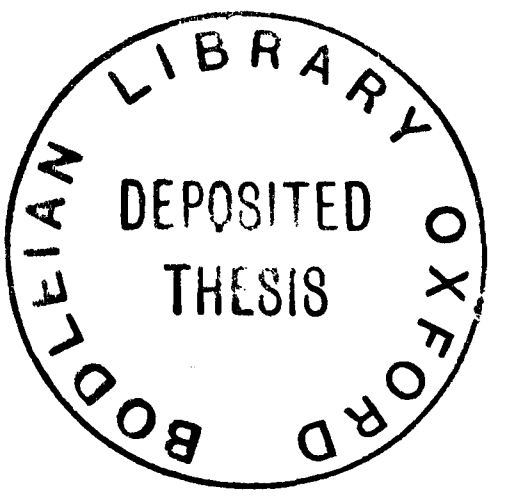
The Ground and Nature of Religious Belief in the Work of John Macmurray, John Baillie and John Oman, With Special Reference to Their Understanding of the Relation Between Ordinary Experience and Religious Belief

Adam Hood, D.Phil. Thesis

Trinity 1999



For Katrina

Abstract

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D.Phil. Thesis, Trinity 1999 (Approx. no of Words: 100,000)

The Ground and Nature of Religious Belief in the Work of John Macmurray, John Baillie and John Oman, With Special Reference to their Understanding of the Relation Between Ordinary Experience and Religious Belief

The study expounds the views of Macmurray, Baillie and Oman on religious belief in the context of their other epistemological, anthropological and theological convictions. It is shown that each of the writers argues that religious belief is a response to a feature of everyday experience (human alienation, moral intuition and the sense of the holy respectively), that each of them takes the view that religious belief functions in order to achieve a valued end (community, willing obedience to divinely ordained duties and the on-going development of moral personality) which is regarded as both the will of God and essential to human flourishing, and that they also hold that religious beliefs may be confirmed in relation to the valued end which they aim to promote.

I argue that whilst each is not without their lacunas and inadequacies, the three writers provide insights which may be useful in understanding religious belief in a Christian context. I maintain, for instance, that Macmurray's argument that religion is a derivative response to a critical dimension of ordinary experience is an illuminating perspective. Again, it is argued that there are resources in Baillie's work to help in the articulation of the view that Christian belief is a response to an a priori encounter with the divine presence in experience. Again, Oman's emphasis on the role of feeling in the disclosure of the divine is plausible, and his analysis of the nature of religious belief is particularly rich in illuminating insights.

An important argument that runs through the thesis is that it is plausible to think that there are preconceptual experiences that are cognitively important. In this sense, the study aims to help underpin an experiential approach in the face of those critics who deny the conceptual possibility of such primal experiences.

Abstract 2

Adam Hood, St. John's College

D.Phil. Thesis, Trinity 1999 (Approx. no of Words: 100,000)

The Ground and Nature of Religious Belief in the Work of John Macmurray, John Baillie and John Oman, With Special Reference to their Understanding of the Relation Between Ordinary Experience and Religious Belief

The study seeks to make a creative contribution to the growing literature on Macmurray, Baillie and Oman; interest in the work of each has, to different extents, enjoyed something of a renaissance recently. The study aims at a clear statement of the views of each of the writers on religion and religious belief through a detailed analyses of the work of each and by a comparative analysis. Again, by a sympathetic but critical analysis of the work of the three thinkers, the thesis endeavors to establish the strengths and weaknesses of their work. Part of the critical focus of the study includes the attempt to mobilise some of the most plausible of the insights of Macmurray and the others in articulating and establishing a series of theses regarding the nature and ground of religious belief. In this sense the study aims to demonstrate the continuing value of the work of the three, and, perhaps, to provide some of the elements of a more systematic treatment of the concept of religious belief.

The study expounds the views of Macmurray, Baillie and Oman on religious belief in the context of their other epistemological, anthropological and theological convictions. It is shown that each of the writers argues that religious belief is a response to a feature of everyday experience (human alienation, moral intuition and the sense of the holy respectively), that each of them takes the view that religious belief functions in order to achieve a valued end (community, willing obedience to divinely ordained duties and the on-going development of moral personality) which is regarded as both the will of God and essential to human flourishing, and that they also hold that religious beliefs may be confirmed in relation to the valued end which they aim to promote.

In Macmurray's case, he argues that religion arises out of the basic human impulse to fellowship or community. Community is, in Macmurray's view, a valued end in that it is the necessary condition of human freedom. In that human beings are best characterised as agents, it follows that freedom is constitutive of human well-being. For Macmurray, religion arises in order to overcome the fear motive which undermines community and it seeks to achieve this by establishing, reinforcing and deepening the awareness of mutual commitment, which is essential to any community. Macmurray holds that, in a functional sense, ritual is the most important aspect of religion; religious belief plays a subsidiary role in helping to maintain and intensify the bonds of community. Moreover, in that religious belief exists to reinforce community, so it can be tested or verified in practice. Formulations of belief may, in Macmurray's view, be tested according to their capacity to engender community.

John Baillie argues that religion is a response to the universal intuition of moral demands which is an integral aspect of ordinary experience. In Baillie's view, implicit in moral intuition is the intuition of a personal God who makes demands upon humankind. In this sense, explicit religious belief and theological thinking are mainly concerned with the recognition and extension of those beliefs which are an implicit part of moral intuition. For Baillie, the role of theology is to assist in the progressive discrimination of the God who reveals himself in moral intuition. Baillie argues that the God who reveals himself in this way is a personal deity, so that theological thinking is the attempt to clarify the cognitive content of the personal encounter between God and humankind. In Baillie's view, faith involves, amongst other things, a trusting acceptance of the obligations which all intuit, and which arise out of the awareness of God's goodness, truthfulness and beauty. This means that in so far as theology is the attempt to deepen faith, it has the function of strengthening human responsiveness to the divine demands. In that theology aims at promoting the valued end of willing responsiveness to divine demands, theological formulations may be tested according to whether they promote the moral and religious duties which are constitutive of fellowship with the divine and human realities.

John Oman holds that the divine or, as he calls it, the supernatural is revealed with and through human knowledge of the material world. In Oman's view, all people have some knowledge of the divine, for

moral personality - which is the differentiating characteristic of human beings - is constituted by a knowledge of the divine and, in particular, by a knowledge of the supernatural as the sphere of incomparable value: the good, the true and the beautiful. Oman holds that knowledge of the human environment involves active interpretation of the meaning of that environment, and this is true both of the material and the divine aspects of the environment. So far as the divine is concerned, Oman's view is that religious belief represents the attempt to interpret the meaning of the supernatural, and that theology is the intensification and systematisation of this attempt. The task of theology is that of probing the nature and significance of the supernatural, and the veridicality of theological work is dependent on it being an honest attempt by an individual theologian to state the truth of that which is known through the felt awareness of the divine sphere which is implicit in all human experience. For Oman, the significance of Christ is, at least in part, that he exemplifies in his words and life the attitude of honest responsiveness to the supernatural which makes for success in the religious and theological life. Oman holds that religious belief, at best, represents the individual's sincere appropriation of the divine reality, and as such the quest for true belief is itself an integral part of the development of moral personality. Oman stresses that in the search for religious knowledge, the Bible and the insights of Christians down through the ages do not function as final authorities, but only as signposts which may or may not be of help to the individual in her quest. The final arbiter of truth in theology, as in other spheres of inquiry, is human experience in its widest sense.

In its critical moment, the study argues that whilst Macmurray, Baillie and Oman are not without their lacunas and inadequacies they provide insights which may be useful in understanding religious belief in a Christian context. I maintain, for instance, that Macmurray's argument that religion is a derivative response to a critical dimension of ordinary experience is an illuminating perspective, though it is also suggested that his thesis that there can only be immediate experience of the material sphere is an illegitimate limitation, in so far as religious people often hold that it is possible to interact with a suprasensory realm.

Again, it is argued that though Baillie's primary argument that religion arises out of moral experience is suspect, yet there are resources in his work to help in the articulation of the view that Christian belief is a response to an all-pervasive encounter with the divine presence in experience.

Again, Oman's emphasis on the role of feeling in the disclosure of the divine is plausible; the case is made that it is conceptually possible, and plausible, to argue that the divine is first disclosed, logically speaking, through a feeling of awe. Though, on the other hand, it is also maintained that in the light of arguments arising within the study of religions, it is implausible for Oman to hold there is one unitive experience of an undifferentiated kind underlying all religion. The case is also made that Oman's analysis of the nature of religious belief is particularly rich in illuminating insights. Oman's understanding of religious belief as interpretative 'meaning' helpfully draws attention to the exploratory, provisional, practical and individual nature of religious belief.

An important argument that runs through the thesis is that it is plausible to think that there are preconceptual experiences that are cognitively important. In this regard, the study seeks to rebut the arguments of such as Katz, Proudfoot and Madges which attempt to establish the impossibility of such primal experiences. In this sense, the study aims to suggest the defensibility of the general approach of Macmurray and the others. Moreover, in that the thesis attempts to defend Baillie's moral intuitionism, it seeks to augment the plausibility of the view of both Oman and Baillie that religion arises in response to a non-conceptual experience of a suprasensory reality.

In so far as the study establishes that Macmurray, Baillie and Oman belong to one philosophical 'type' - they each, it is argued, provide a functional and experiential account of religion - so it may be argued the study underlines the plausibility of this 'type' and points forward to further inquiries which would seek to determine the strengths, weaknesses and provenance of their approach. Especially intriguing is the question of whether and to what extent the writers represent a distinctive Scottish approach to the analysis of religion.

Abbreviations & Editions Used in Text

John Macmurray

CH: *The Clue to History* (London: SCM, 1938).

IU: *Interpreting the Universe* (London: Faber, 1933).

PR: *Persons in Relation,* new edn (New Jersey: Humanities, 1991).

RAS: *Religion, Art and Science* (Toronto: John Macmurray Society, 1986).

RE: *Reason and Emotion*, 2nd edn (New Jersey: Humanities, 1992).

SA: *The Self as Agent,* new edn (New Jersey: Humanities, 1991).

SRE: *The Structure of Religious Experience* (London: Faber, 1936).

SRR: *Search for Reality in Religion* (London: Quaker, 1984).

Action: 'What is Action', *Aristotelian Society*, Suppl. 17 (1938), 69-85.

John Baillie

IP: *Invitation to Pilgrimage* (London: OUP, 1942).

IR: *The Interpretation of Religion* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1929).

IRRT: *The Idea of Revelation in Recent Thought* (New York: Columbia, 1956).

LE: *And the Life Everlasting* (London: OUP, 1934).

OG: *Our Knowledge of God* (London: OUP, 1939).

PJC: *The Place of Jesus Christ in Modern Christianity* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1929).

RR: *The Roots of Religion in the Human Soul* (London: Hodder, 1926).

SPG: *The Sense of the Presence of God* (London: OUP, 1962).

John Oman

CDO: *The Church and the Divine Order* (London: Hodder, 1911).

GP: *Grace and Personality* (London: CUP, 1931).

HR: *Honest Religion* (London: Religious Book Club, 1941).

Method: 'Method in Theology', *The Expositor*, 26 (1923), 81-93.

NS: *The Natural and the Supernatural* (London: CUP, 1931).

Sphere: 'The Sphere of Religion', in *Science, Religion and Reality*, ed. by Joseph Needham (London: Sheldon, 1926), pp.259-299.

VA: *Vision and Authority* (London: Hodder, 1928).

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Chapter 1

Introduction

This study will consider the work of John Macmurray, John Baillie and John Oman; it will aim to illuminate and assess critically their ideas on the ground and nature of religious belief, with special reference to their understanding of the relationship between ordinary experience and religious belief. In its expository and comparative moment, the study will show that the three writers adopt a similar functional and experiential approach to the analysis of religion, though their accounts differ in important points of detail. In its critical moment, the study will suggest the plausibility and fruitfulness of an experiential approach to religion; it will also aim to establish specific insights into the ground and nature of religious belief.

S1 Biographical Excursus

John Oman (1860-1939) was born in Orkney in 1860.[1] He studied for the presbyterian ministry in Edinburgh and was elected in 1889 to the pastoral charge of Clayport Presbyterian Church of England, Alnwick where he remained until 1907 when he was appointed as Professor of Theology in Westminster College, Cambridge. Whilst Oman had already published two books during his time in Alnwick, his appointment to Westminster began an new stage in an illustrious scholarly career that was to bring him,

[1] For biographical details see: F.H. Ballard, 'Introduction', HR, pp.XI-XIV; F.R. Tennant, 'John Wood Oman 1860-1939', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 25 (1939), 332-338.

among other honours, honorary degrees from Oxford and Edinburgh, membership of Queen's College, Cambridge, an Honorary Fellowship at Jesus College, Cambridge, and membership of the British Academy. Oman was also Principal of Westminster College from 1922 until 1935 during which time he served for one year as Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of England. By common consent, Oman's two most important books are *Grace and Personality* and *The Natural and the Supernatural*. According to Tennant, in these books Oman argues for and works out the ramifications of two primary convictions. The first, is that knowledge of the divine is not inferentially acquired but 'is of the nature of direct, unmediated, intuition'.[2] This is the teaching particularly developed in Oman's magnum opus *The Natural and the Supernatural*, and the religious epistemology developed there has been lauded as theologically original and offering a key to the problem of religious knowledge.[3]

According to Tennant:

> [Oman's] Next most fervently cherished conviction was as to man's inviolable freedom, the ethical dignity of human personality, and the necessity to see truth with one's own eyes.[4]

The implication of Oman's conviction of the freedom and dignity of humankind is worked out in *Grace and Personality*, in which he argues that:

> Grace, or any divine action upon men, can only be regarded worthily when restricted to personal dealings with persons and, consequently, to appeals to human reason and conscience.[5]

Grace and Personality is an attempt to think through various central aspects of the Christian faith from the point of view of the conviction that God is personal and always deals with humankind in a personal

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[2] Tennant, p.334.

[3] John Hick, *Faith and Knowledge*, 2nd edn (London: Macmillan, 1967), pp.6-7.

[4] pp.335-336.

[5] Tennant, p.337.

manner, and of this work Tennant comments that 'those who agree with him will account this book one of the more valuable treasures of theological literature'.[6]

John Macmurray (1891-1976) was born in South West Scotland in 1891.[7] He studied in Glasgow and Oxford, though his period as a Oxford student was disrupted by service in the Great War during which he was awarded the Military Cross. During his career as a philosopher Macmurray held several important posts including the Grote Professorship of Mind and Logic at University College, London, and the Professorship of Moral Philosophy at Edinburgh. Macmurray was well known during the thirties as a broadcaster, and he published a number of his broadcast philosophical talks in *Freedom in the Modern World*. Indeed, one of the distinctive features of Macmurray's work, and one that partly explains his popularity amongst non philosophers, is that he was interested in relating philosophical discourse to matters of current, vital interest.

Macmurray's work was markedly consistent throughout his career, and there are two basic ideas which he develops in his books. Firstly, he argues that philosophy must try to address its subject matter from within the horizon of 'a material agent in a world of other material agents rather than from that of an isolated, purely thinking being' as putatively postulated by Descartes.[8] Secondly, he contends that philosophy must work from the standpoint which recognises that agents find their identity and fulfilment in personal relationships with others. Macmurray's philosophy may be seen as the attempt to articulate these two thoughts and to work out their implications for a whole range of subjects including knowledge, thought, religion, and human rationality.

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[6] p.337.

[7] For biographical details see SRR, pp.5-28.

[8] Philip Conford, 'Introduction' in *The Personal World: John Macmurray on Self and Society*, ed. by Philip Conford (Edinburgh: Floris, 1996), pp.13-28 (p.20).

John Baillie (1886-1960) was born in Gairloch, Scotland, and was the son of a Free Church minister.[9] He studied for the ministry in Edinburgh, and during his career as a theologian he filled professorial posts in the USA and the Chair of Divinity in Edinburgh. Baillie was a very active churchman and administrator. In 1943 he was elected Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, in 1950 he became Principal of New College and Dean of Edinburgh's Faculty of Divinity, and in 1954 he was appointed, at Evanston, one of the six Presidents of the World Council of Churches.

Baillie had a diversity of interests in the fields of dogmatic and philosophical theology, and this is reflected in books on christology, revelation, the philosophy of history and the doctrine of life after death. There are however certain trajectories of interest which are found running through his work as a whole. Arguably, amongst his continuing interests are his conviction that religion is deeply rooted in human experience, and his emphasis on the interpersonal character of religious knowledge.

S2 Definitions and Criteria

This thesis is concerned with the **ground** and **nature** of **religious belief** in the light of the relation between belief and **ordinary experience,** and it will be helpful at this early point to clarify and discuss the use of these four terms. By 'ground' is understood that which gives rise to the articulation of religious beliefs and the believing of such beliefs. Three possible grounds of religious beliefs might be mentioned, though these are not necessarily exhaustive. Religious beliefs may, perhaps, be grounded in experiences of certain kinds, just as the belief that I am now looking at a door may be caused by a certain kind of perceptual experience. Again, religious beliefs may arise as the conclusion of an evidentially based argument. Or, religious beliefs may arise out of a transcendental deduction in which they articulate the necessary transcendental conditions of an established conclusion.

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[9] For biographical details see Alec C. Cheyne, 'The Baillie Brothers' in *Christ, Church and Society*, ed. by David Fergusson (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), pp.3-37.

In their search for the ground of religion Macmurray, Baillie and Oman offer putative accounts of the historical origins of religion qua religion. In this study their work will not be assessed on the basis of whether they achieve this end, but on a more modest basis.

Firstly, it will be assumed that the search for the historical origin of religion is futile, for as Alston notes:

> Since we know virtually nothing about the prehistoric origins of religion, speculation in this area is almost completely unchecked by data, and it seems impossible to find any rational basis for choosing between alternative genetic accounts.[10]

As against a genetic approach, the work of Oman, Baillie and Macmurray will be scrutinised to see if they can provide insight into the reasons why religious beliefs are articulated and believed. In scrutinising their work it will be presupposed that no one point of viewing can offer a complete account of the ground of religious belief, and that Macmurray, Oman and Baillie must be assessed on the basis of whether, on the one hand, they enable a fuller understanding of the connections which may exist between ordinary experience and religious belief, and whether, on the other, they fructify our understanding of the nature of religious belief.

Secondly, I shall primarily be concerned with whether or not Macmurray and the others offer a plausible and fruitful account of Christianity - such a restriction is necessary to keep the study within the bounds of practical possibility.

In talking of the 'nature' of religious belief the reference is to the characteristics of religious beliefs and believing: what distinguishes religious beliefs and what characterises the way in which Christians affirm

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[10] William P. Alston, 'Religion', in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. by Paul Edwards, 8 vols (London: Macmillan, 1967), VII, pp.140-145 (p.141).

their beliefs. The assessment of Macmurray and the others at this point will be concerned with the degree to which their accounts 'fit' with what is already known of (religious) belief, philosophically and theologically speaking. Moreover, the writers will also be assessed as to the fruitfulness of their work, by which is meant the degree to which it illuminates aspects of religious belief and believing which may be overlooked. A presupposition of this assessment will be that 'belief' and 'believing' are two basic concepts which inform the everyday experience of the Christian community, and that there is a 'tacit and unconscious mastery' of these concepts in the daily practice of the Church as it is guided by the Bible and tradition.[11] In other words, the writers will be assessed as to whether they are able to offer ways of analysing and describing the concepts of 'religious belief' and 'believing' as they actually function in the practice of the Christian community. One aspect of this critical analysis, will be a concern with the ideas of the three thinkers on the nature and task of theology. Their ideas on theology are relevant, in so far as they disclose what Macmurray, Baillie and Oman think on the question of religious belief.

By the nature of the study, the understanding of the concept of 'religious belief' will develop with the discussion. Nevertheless, it is necessary to begin with a minimal definition of the concept. Religious belief may be taken to refer both to religious propositions such as are found in the Creeds and the disposition under certain circumstances to affirm such propositions: religious belief refers to the propositions and the believing of these propositions. With regard to the believing of religious propositions, the disposition to affirm distinctively Christian propositions is a sine qua non of religious belief.

Finally, 'ordinary experience' as it is used here refers to those modes of experience and those experiences which are, in principle, available to all people with normal sensory equipment functioning normally. Ordinary experience, then, may also be called common experience, and it can be contrasted with those forms of experience which are privileged. The concept of revelation, in so far as it refers to the divine disclosure of knowledge which could not be known in any other way and which is only given to certain people under certain conditions, points to a form of privileged knowledge and perhaps the

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[11] P.T. Strawson, *Analysis and Metaphysics* (Oxford: OUP, 1992), p.5.

best way of defining ordinary experience, in so far as it concerns this thesis, is that it is all forms of experience which do not arise from special revelations of this kind. This definition does not rule out the possibility that elements of ordinary experience may convey divine revelations in the form of general revelations available to all.

Another variant way of thinking of 'ordinary experience' is to think of it as mundane human experience, the sort of unremarkable experience which characterises everyday human life. In this sense, ordinary experience may be distinguished from extraordinary experiences such as the revelation of Christ to Paul on the Damascus road. This thesis is concerned with how the three writers understand the relationship between religious belief, and those aspects of everyday experience which appear to be relevant to an account of religious belief.

S3 The Aims of the Study

There has recently been some glimmerings of a renewed interest in Macmurray, Baillie and Oman. This thesis aims to contribute to this welcome trend, and it will do this, firstly, by discussing aspects of the work of the three which have not previously received proper attention, secondly, by studying the writers comparatively which will enable a clear view of their understanding of religious belief, thirdly, by the adoption of a sympathetic but critical tone, and fourthly, by attempting to rebut an important contemporary argument, which if allowed, seriously undermines a functional and experiential approach to religion such as is adopted by the three writers.

S3.1 A Renaissance of Interest

Whilst there has, of course, always been some concern with Macmurray, Baillie and Oman, and this is reflected, on the one hand, in the extant body of post-graduate[12] and published work dealing with their ideas ,and, on the other, by their acknowledged influence on important writers.[13] It is however true that over the years there has been a distinct erosion of interest, such that most of the academic work done on the three prior to the current decade was authored in the fifties, sixties and early seventies. In contrast to this, the salient fact of the past ten years or so is that awareness of their work is once again growing and this is reflected in conferences held, books published and articles issued, though it would be true to say that the degree of interest which each evokes varies a great deal.

The greatest interest has been shown in Macmurray, and one sign of the new enthusiasm is found in the recent republication of some of his most important works.[14] A Macmurray anthology has also recently been published.[15] Moreover, there has also been growth in the secondary literature dealing with or alluding to Macmurray.[16] The fact that a Macmurray conference was recently held under the auspices of the University of Aberdeen testifies to the more positive reception which he is now receiving.

The new awareness of John Baillie, whilst not comparable in scale to that of Macmurray, has also been reflected in conferences held and books published. During the late eighties two conferences were held in Scotland to mark the centenaries of the birth of the Baillie brothers, John and Donald. Out of these conferences came a volume containing excellent historical and theological analyses of John Baillie's work.[17] More recently a slim Baillie anthology has been published,[18] and Professor Newlands of

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[12] For details of the literature on the three writers see the bibliography.

[13] See, for instance, the influence of Macmurray and Baillie on Thomas F. Torrance, *Theological Science* (London: OUP, 1969); and the influence of Oman on John Hick, reflected in his book *Faith and Knowledge*.

[14] See bibliography

[15] *The Personal World: John Macmurray on Self and Society*, ed. by Philip Conford (Edinburgh: Floris, 1996).

[16] See, for instance, David A.S. Fergusson, *Macmurray in a Nutshell* (Edinburgh: Handsel, 1992); Jon Sopel, *Tony Blair: The Moderniser* (London: Michael Joseph, 1995); Frank Kirkpatrick, *Together Bound: God, History and the Religious Community* (Oxford: OUP, 1994).

[17] *Christ, Church and Society*, ed. by David Fergusson (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993) .

[18] *John and Donald Baillie: Selected Writings*, ed. by David Fergusson (Edinburgh: St. Andrews, 1997)

Glasgow is currently preparing a biographical account of the Baillie brothers which will complement the body of work already in place. Moreover, attention has also been given to Baillie from outside of the theological community.[19]

Concern with Oman has been stimulated by the appearance of a fine monograph by Stephen Bevans, *John Oman and His Doctrine of God*.[20] John Hick and Christoph Schwöbel, both prominent religious thinkers, have been fulsome in their praise of this book, and several writers have commented on the contemporary significance of Oman's work,[21] Schwöbel writes:

> Oman is one of the British theologians of this century who deserves a renaissance, and this study [Bevans' book] will do much to remind a general theological audience of the significance of this great Cambridge theologian.[22]

The contemporary concern with the work of Macmurray, Oman and Baillie may be traced to various factors. Macmurray has commanded attention partly because Tony Blair, the British Prime Minister, has openly owned him as a theological and philosophical mentor.[23] It is an interesting question whether Blair has in fact been guided by Macmurray's ideas,[24] but whatever the exact relationship it is incontrovertible that in large part the recent interest in Macmurray's work has been stimulated by the Prime Minister's interest in him. But there are also deeper intellectual and social reasons for his renewed prominence. The current interest in Macmurray is due, in part, to the capacity of his work to offer a critical perspective on some prominent features of contemporary society. In particular, Macmurray offers the basis for a searching critique of the individualism of our age, and of the tendency

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[19] Craig Beveridge and Ronald Turnbull, *The Eclipse of Scottish Culture* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1989), pp.62-76; 91-111.

[20] Stephen Bevans, *John Oman and His Doctrine of God* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992).

[21] Cyril S. Rodd, 'To Present the Truth', *Expository Times*, 104 (1992), 32.

[22] Quoted on the back cover of Bevans, *Doctrine of God*.

[23] Conford, p.13; also David McIntosh, 'Down-to-Earth Philosopher Who Moulded Blair's Vision', *Evening News*, 24 September 1997, p.9.

[24] Samuel Brittan, 'Tony Blair's Real Guru', *New Statesman*, 7 February 1997, pp.18-20.

to interpret human life and fulfilment in terms of sexual gratification or the consumption of material goods.[25]

Interest in Oman's work has received a fillip from Bevans' book. Bevans writes that his interest in Oman is, in part, connected to Oman's insistence that it is necessary to think of God and grace in ways which are consistent with the moral personality of human beings. This feature of Oman's work is attractive to Bevans since it confirms and strengthens his own conviction that 'we need to break the stranglehold that a mechanistic image of the universe has on our imagination if we are adequately to image the God of Jesus Christ in today's world'.[26] Thus, Oman has come back to the attention of the theological community as a theologian with a distinctively personalist mode of thought. In this sense, the re-emergence of Oman may be seen as connected to the general interest in the theological significance of the concept of the 'personal'.

Again, whilst the most recent work on Baillie has been motivated by the mere contingency that he was born in 1886, it can be argued that the interest in Baillie has also some more profound roots. At least three reasons for the new interest in Baillie can be discerned. The recognition given to Baillie arises, in the first place, from the fact that he exemplifies an attractive eirenic approach to theology. A feature of Baillie's work, is that he establishes his conclusions through probing apparently diverse points of view (theological and other) in order to identify the points at which they agree and the ways in which they can be mutually enriching. In this regard, it has been argued that Baillie is a 'mediating theologian' in that:

> He sought to reconcile the methods of philosophy and theology, liberalism and orthodoxy, Christianity and contemporary culture, and hope for this world with faith in the life to come.[27]

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[25] Martin Jarreh-Kerr & Alan Ecclestone, 'Rereview of The Form of the Personal', *Modern Churchman*, 31 (1990), 35-47.

[26] Bevans, p.2.

[27] David A.S. Fergusson, 'John Baillie: Orthodox Liberal', in *Christ, Church and Society*, pp.123-153 (p.152).

A specific example of how Baillie tried to mediate between positions, is found in his attempt to bring together the insights of Barth with pre and post Barthian theologies. Of this effort Professor Cheyne comments that 'it is not the least of their [the Baillies] many services to the Christian thought of our time'.[28] In that Baillie exemplifies a 'mediating theology', it may be suggested that he represents a theological method which is particularly suited to a theologically and culturally pluralist age.

Secondly, for all that Baillie's theology was informed by the desire to give an honest appraisal of various points of view, this does not mean that he 'sought an easy and comfortable compromise between opposites'.[29] Rather, Baillie's theology was consistently apologetic in its intention, and it is as an example of a good apologetical theologian that Baillie continues to claim our interest. Baillie's apologetical method is striking in two senses.[30] Firstly, it is shaped by a keen sensitivity to the position of those who have honest doubts about Christianity. Secondly, it places greatest value on the lucid articulation of the faith as against the rebuttal of anti-religious arguments.

Thirdly, it has been argued that Baillie is important in so far as he articulates, along with Macmurray and others, a distinctive Scottish approach to questions of human existence. The argument is that Baillie and others stand out from the main stream of Anglo-American philosophy by their insistence that all of human experience is philosophically important, and their conviction that philosophy ought to have a practical orientation. In this regard, Beveridge and Turnbull highlight the desire of Macmurray and Baillie to place the concrete personal existence of human beings at the centre of their thinking.[31] In so far as this is a characteristic of Macmurray and Baillie it is one which they share with Oman, and in the end perhaps one of the main reasons why these three thinkers still command attention is their insistence on the importance of personal categories in theological and philosophical analysis.

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[28] Cheyne, pp.36-37.

[29] Fergusson, p.153.

[30] Cheyne, pp.21-33.

[31] Beveridge, pp.62-76; 91-111.

S3.2 A New Angle of Viewing

Part of the interest of the present study is that its concern with the ground and nature of religion represents a new approach to the study of Macmurray, Oman and Baillie. A review of the relevant published and unpublished literature shows that, whilst there have been a number of in-depth studies which have touched on issues related to religious belief, no study has been attempted with the specific concerns which inform the present one: none has had a specific interest in religious belief, and none has attempted to articulate the consequences of the epistemological views of Macmurray and the others for their view of the nature of religious belief.

S3.3 A Comparative Study

Another important feature of the thesis is that it will involve a comparative analysis of Macmurray, Baillie and Oman. A comparison of these three writers on religious belief, or any other subject, has not been done before. But mere novelty, in itself, is not particularly significant. What is of importance, is that this study will attempt to show that the three writers belong to one theological or philosophical 'type', which is to say that each offers what may be called a functional and experiential account of religion.[32] By this is meant that each argues that religion arises out of some very basic and universal aspect of experience, that it is impelled by a distinctive function in relation to experience, and that the character of religious belief is shaped by this. In Macmurray's case, religion is said to arise from the consciousness of factors inhibiting the self's freedom, and it aims to achieve human freedom through reinforcing and extending community. Baillie, for his part, argues that religious belief arises from the awareness of absolute moral demands, and is concerned with the strengthening of obedience to these. Whilst Oman holds, that religious belief arises from a feeling or sense of the sacred, and aims to encourage an appropriate intellectual and practical response to the divine.

In as much as Macmurray and the others do belong to one type, it ought to be possible, by the comparison of the three, to clarify the details of their accounts of religious belief with some precision. On the one hand, the comparative method will enable us to clearly identify the ideas which they hold in

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[32] For a discussion of the idea of the 'type' see Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation* (New York: Orbis, 1983).

common and which distinguish them as a group from others. The identification of the ideas which they hold in common will also enable the assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of their general approach to religion. On the other hand, the identification of the similarities that putatively exist between them will make us more sensitive to the nuances of their respective accounts, and in this way the study will highlight some of the possible different expressions which an experiential approach might take.

S3.4 A Different Tone

Broadly speaking the extended studies which have been done on Macmurray, Oman and Baillie have tended to be expository exercises. Examples of expository works are those of Healey[33] and Bevans on Oman, the doctoral theses of Tozer[34] and Fisher[35] on Baillie and the studies of Kirkpatrick[36] and Thomason[37] on Macmurray. All these studies set out to explain some aspect of the writings of one of the three thinkers, and to place them in their historical and intellectual context. Thus, Bevans is interested in articulating Oman's doctrine of God, which he locates against a background of personal idealism and the theology of Schleiermacher; Fisher discusses Baillie's understanding of knowledge of God, and a major theme of his discussion is the claim that Baillie's work developed over time and that there are tensions between the early and late Baillie; and Thomason analyses the empirical basis for religion in John Macmurray's philosophy, and a particular interest of his is the sense in which Macmurray's work can be understood as being in continuity with two forms of empiricism: Classical Empiricism and Pragmatism.

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[33] F.G. Healey, *Religion and Reality* (Edinburgh: Oliver, 1965).

[34] James R. Tozer, 'The Concept of God in the Writings of John Baillie' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Northwestern University, 1971).

[35] Neal F. Fisher, 'Knowledge of God in John Baillie's Theology' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Boston University, 1966).

[36] Frank L. Kirkpatrick, 'The Idea of God in the Thought of John Macmurray' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Brown University, 1970).

[37] Walter P. Thomason, 'The Empirical Basis for Religion in John Macmurray' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1972).

One feature of all these studies, is that they are relatively uncritical of the authors with whom they are concerned. In so far as these studies are critical, it is in the sense that they strive to resolve the ambiguities of and rebut the attacks on the author with whom they are dealing. Good examples of critical work of this kind is found in the theses of Kirkpatrick and Thomason. Kirkpatrick presents a searching account and robust defence of Macmurray's religious epistemology, whilst Thomason argues strongly against Langford's accusation that Macmurray fails to distinguish adequately between the divine and the human.

In contrast to the expository and relatively uncritical tone of the studies which have been discussed, the present study aims both to give a clear account of the work of the three on religious belief and to enter into a sympathetic, constructive and critical engagement with their work. The dual presuppositions of the study will be that there are important insights to be gleaned from the work of Macmurray, Baillie and Oman, but that it is likely that each will also exhibit certain lacunas or inadequacies. Thus, this study aims both at exposition and critical revision. Moreover, the tone of this study differs not only from the expository studies referred to above, it is also quite distinct from the philosophically rigorous but almost wholly negative approach of Roy in his study of Macmurray.[38]

S3.5 A Contemporary Challenge

A feature of the present study, is that it will involve recurrent discussion of and attempts to rebut a powerful contemporary criticism of an experiential account of religion. In this sense, one of the most important tasks of the study is to establish the plausibility of the general approach taken up by Oman and the others, and in this the thesis will break new ground so far as the study of these authors is concerned. Of course, the plausibility of an experiential account does not only depend upon the rebuttal of criticisms, the fruitfulness of such an account is also an aspect of its plausibility. Nevertheless, it is important to the viability of an experiential account that it can be seen to be able to meet criticisms.

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[38] Louis P. Roy, 'The Form of the Personal' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Cambridge, 1984).

The particular argument which the thesis will strive to rebut is one which is currently influential over the spectrum of disciplines concerned with religion. In theology, this argument has been championed by the distinguished Yale theologian George Lindbeck, who argues that:

> A religion, is above all an external word, a *verbum externum*, that moulds and shapes the self and its world, rather than the expression or thematization of a pre-existing self or preconceptual experience.[39]

Underlying Lindbeck's thesis is the philosophical argument which stresses:

> The degree to which human experience is shaped, moulded, and in a sense constituted by cultural and linguistic forms. There are numberless thoughts we cannot think, sentiments we cannot have, and realities we cannot perceive unless we learn to use the appropriate symbol systems.[40]

Lindbeck's argument is that since there is no preconceptual awareness and knowledge, it follows that religion and religious belief cannot be understood as a response to or articulation of primal experiences of this kind. Moreover, a similar argument has been deployed in the study of religions. Steven Katz has argued in relation to mystical experience, that such experiences as are found in different religions do not relate to the awareness of one reality, but to radically different forms of experience and experiential beliefs.[41] Underlying this position is a view, similar to that espoused by Lindbeck, that mystical phenomena and beliefs are constituted by the religious contexts in which they arise.

The arguments of Lindbeck and Katz clearly represent an important challenge to any experiential account of religion, in so far as such an account depends upon the idea of preconceptual experiences.

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[39] George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine* (London: SPCK, 1984), p.34.

[40] Lindbeck, p.34.

[41] Steven T. Katz, 'Language, Epistemology and Mysticism' in *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, ed. by Steven T. Katz (London: Sheldon, 1978), pp.22-74.

This thesis holds that the idea of such experiences is logically and theologically plausible, and the success of this study will be dependent, in part, upon whether this argument can be sustained.

Conclusion

The task of this study, it has been said, is to clarify and assess the ideas of Macmurray, Baillie and Oman on the ground and nature of religious belief. The two theses which will inform this study are, firstly, that the three authors share a similar general functional and experiential approach to the issue - though there are differences of detail - and that this approach is both a defensible and an insightful one, and, secondly, that through the critical analysis of Macmurray and the others it will be possible to establish specific insights into the ground and nature of religious belief.

The study will begin by focusing on Macmurray. In Chapter Two his understanding of experience will be assessed. In Chapter Three his view of human reflection, and, in particular, the nature and function of religion and religious belief will be discussed. Chapter Four will focus on Baillie's intuitionist account of religion, which will then be scrutinised in Chapter Five. Chapter Six will expound Oman's complex religious epistemology and his understanding of the nature of religious belief, and in Chapter Seven this will be assessed with special attention being paid to his use of the concept of feeling. The final chapter will detail the specific conclusions of the study, draw out the comparisons and contrasts between the three writers, and offer suggestions as to the overall value of the study.

Chapter 2

John Macmurray: Immediate Experience and the Need of Fellowship

John Macmurray argues that there is a universal, immediate awareness of the need for human fellowship, and it is this awareness which gives rise to religious belief: the function of religion is, by its practices and beliefs, to establish human fellowship. The next two chapters will explore critically Macmurray's ideas. This chapter will focus on Macmurray's analysis of immediate experience, and his claim that there is a universal awareness of the need of fellowship. Chapter three will discuss Macmurray's understanding of reflective experience, and ,specifically, his claim that religion exists to bring about community.

S1 Immediate Experience

Macmurray's major argument is that agency is the concept which throws most light on the nature of human existence. On the basis of his understanding of agency, Macmurray argues that there are two basic forms of human experience, immediate and reflective. Immediate experience is that awareness which is an integral part of all action, and it yields an immediate knowledge of the human environment which is characterised by wholeness and the capacity for development. Moreover, immediate experience includes the awareness of and aspiration towards human fellowship as the ultimate condition of human freedom.

S 1.1 Agency

In discussing immediate experience it is important to begin with a clear idea of Macmurray's understanding of 'agency', for this is the concept which controls his view of experience; the distinction between immediate and reflective experience is to do with the relation of two forms of awareness to action. In explicating his view of action, Macmurray dwells on what he sees as the two indispensable aspects of an action. Firstly, an action includes 'a change in the external world'. This is a matter of the utmost importance, for this assertion rules out the possibility of regarding a change of mind or some such change as an action. Macmurray argues that one either thinks or acts. Thinking is only concerned with changing ideas. Acting is concerned with change in the external world. It is, moreover, very difficult if not impossible to both think and act at the same time; it is only possible when the action in question is done habitually, otherwise the attempt to both think and act at the same time will produce mutual inhibition.[1]

The second element in action is the non-observable one. An action must be more than a change in the world, for if it were not it would, in practice, be indistinguishable from an accident. Macmurray holds that an action is a change in the world which has its source in an agent. Thus, in an action it is possible to distinguish a duality of doing and deed, acting and act. It is the doing/acting that allows one to distinguish between the deed and the event. The latter is a change in the not-self which does not find its source in an agent.

Macmurray stresses that the relation between the deed and the doing is not analysable in terms of cause and effect. His view is that the deed and the doing have an existential interdependence, such that it is not possible to distinguish one as logically prior to or independent of the other. In an action, the deed and the doing cannot be dissociated from the other. Thus, an action is not a collocation of an intention (or some other state of consciousness) with a deed, but the 'doing of a deed'.[2] Macmurray wishes to avoid any dualism of mind and body which may be associated with a logical distinction between cause

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[1] Action, p.77.

[2] Action, p.76.

and effect. Thus, doing and deed are to be thought of as 'existentially simultaneous', though Macmurray does not himself use this term.

One important claim of Macmurray's is that in action the agent is conscious and knowledgeable.[3] This is to say that action is to be thought of as including mental activity along with physical activity. Thus, the distinction which Macmurray draws between thought and action is not in fact a distinction between the mental and physical, but between the activity of thinking about the world and consciously acting in the world. It is the distinction between riding a bike, and thinking about the principles of cycling; in both activities one is conscious, but the form of one's consciousness differs in each. When we ride a bike our consciousness is part of our activity. When we think about our activity we reflect upon the knowledge implicit in our consciousness at the time of riding. Already it may be seen why Macmurray claims that the primary mode of human knowledge is found in action. This is because all reflective thinking is thinking about the world which is encountered only in action, and this leads Macmurray to argue that human thinking is meaningful only as it refers to human experience of the world.

S 1.2 Immediate and Reflective Experience

Macmurray, in his theory of action, argues that there are two fundamental forms of human awareness, and he maintains that this proposition is confirmed by the prima facie evidence of everyday experience. Thus, for instance, in the case of a sporting activity such as skating, it is commonplace for a distinction to be drawn between being aware of how to skate, and understanding the principles of skating.[4] That there is an important distinction here is shown by the fact that it is possible to understand the principles of skating without being able to skate. On the other hand, it is clearly possible that a person might be a good skater, and yet remain quite unable to state the principles that govern the practice of skating. From this illustration it is possible to begin to specify more clearly the case that Macmurray is making. Firstly, it should be noted that the distinction he is pointing to is between two types of experience,

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[3] Action, p.77.

[4] IU, p.14.

immediate and reflective.[5] The distinction between these two modes of human experience is described by Macmurray in various ways: it is that between being immediately aware of and understanding; it is that between expressed and unexpressed experience; it is that between the awareness that accompanies action and the awareness that is part of reflective thought.[6] For Macmurray, immediate experience arises in agency, and this experience is qualitatively different from reflective experience; the nature of the difference is pinpointed in the claim that primary experience is unarticulated experience. Primary or immediate experience is that experience which is reflected upon, and as such it cannot be synonymous with reflective experience. In a logical sense it must be prior to all reflection. Implicit in what has been said above, is the assumption that reflection is dependent upon immediate experience: in thinking attention is given to an entity as it has been known in action. Thus, thought is the attempt to determine in idea what a person has encountered in action.

S 1.3 Immediate Experience and Primary Knowledge

In Macmurray's view, immediate experience gives rise to the primary form of human knowledge of the environment. This knowledge arises primarily from the tactual sense; it has to do with intention; it has a twofold reference to the self and the not-self; its exhibits a potential for growth; and it is characterised by wholeness.

S 1.4 Immediate Knowledge and the Senses

In discussing how immediate knowledge arises in action, Macmurray focuses upon the place of the senses. He argues that the common philosophical understanding of the relation of the senses to knowledge, has taken the visual sense as a model for the understanding of all the senses, and this has led to the tendency to think of the acquiring of knowledge as a passive act.[7] That is, the visual is essentially a form of sensing that involves observing an object that one is interested in, and in this way the visual implies a subject passively observing an object. If this is taken as a model of knowledge gathering, then

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[5] IU, p.12.

[6] IU, pp.12-14.

[7] SA, p.108.

knowledge is inevitably seen as distinct from agency. Macmurray wishes to argue that this is a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of cognition. In his view, cognition is better understood on the model of the tactual, which is the primary form of sensory awareness. That the tactual is more fundamental to human existence than the visual, is seen in the fact that human existence is unthinkable in the absence of the tactual, whilst it perfectly conceivable in the absence of the visual. Thus, blind people can enjoy a full existence, but an existence in which all forms of the tactile are missing is inconceivable, for at the very least this would be an existence in which we could not know anything; it would be impossible to discriminate between the illusory and the real. Of course, this same point could be made against the claim of knowledge of the other via the tactile, for, as Macmurray himself recognises, there are instances in which a putative tactile awareness can prove illusory. Perhaps the point that Macmurray might make in response to this criticism, is that instances of illusory tactual awareness are so few as to be unimportant.

Accepting Macmurray's designation of the primacy of the tactual in awareness, what then is the specific way in which immediate knowledge develops out of touch? Macmurray suggests that the tactual must be understood as the experience of resistance, and this explains why it is the primary sense; for in that human existence lies in action, which is to do with a 'moving' in the world, then the primary experience of the world must be the experience of resistance to one's actions. It is, then, the basic nature of action as contact with the non-self that suggests the fundamental place of the tactual in primary knowledge.[8] In so far as this is true, then it is possible to make several other important points. One is that it is touch which allows the agent to know the not-self as distinct from herself. This leads on to the perception that touch also enables the differentiation of the self, for the self is only differentiated in the moment when the not-self is identified as distinct from the knowing self. Thus, the differentiation of the self and the other are corresponding moments of tactual awareness as found in action.[9]

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[8] SA, p.109.

[9] SA, p.110.

S 1.5 Immediate Knowledge and Intention

The key to understanding the character of immediate knowledge, as Macmurray apprehends it, is keeping in mind that it is the form of awareness found in action. One important point is that action is typified as intentional, and this means that immediate knowledge must be to do with intention. The concept of intention refers to the agent's intending to change the non-self in a certain manner. This suggests, that immediate knowing includes the agent's knowing that they are acting and what they are doing to or with the non-self.[10] On the other hand, though agents will always know that they are doing this and not that, the knowledge that is part of agency is never a complete knowledge for two reasons. Firstly, immediate knowledge is always incomplete because we may know that we are doing such and such without knowing completely what the results of that action will be. Secondly, immediate knowledge is always incomplete in that any action may begin with one intention and end with another, there is always room for alteration in the course of an action.[11]

Intention refers to an anticipatory form of knowledge. This corresponds to the fact that time is regarded by Macmurray as the essential form of action.[12] Action is temporal in form in the sense that to act is to intend the determination of the non-self in the future; it is also to intend the future within the constraints set by past actions. This is another way of saying that agents are both immanent and transcendent: they are immanent in that their actions are shaped by the circumstances in which the act; they are transcendent in that the given can be transcended through their actions.

The second dimension of immediate knowing refers to the determinate past. That there is a second dimension to immediate knowledge is inherent in the intentional nature of action. If action is purposeful then it must involve the agent's knowledge of doing this and not that. This suggests that intention involves choice, for to intend one course of action is to refuse another, so the negative dimension of intention must be a knowledge of the possibilities that lie open to the agent. Thus, intention implies a

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[10] SA, pp.165-166.

[11] SA, p.171.

[12] SA, p.169.

secondary and subsidiary dimension to immediate knowledge. The character of this second aspect of immediate knowledge is that it is the self's knowledge of the possibilities inherent in the past, and this form of knowledge is given in memory.[13] In memory the self gives attention to the features of the determinate other, so as to identify the possibilities of action, and the possible means for realising the intentions which the agent has to hand. That is, attention brings out the possible ends which intention may choose from and pinpoints the most efficient means to the fulfilment of the chosen ends. Thus, intention and attention refer to the two aspects of the self's knowledge of the other in action.[14]

S 1.6 The Self and the Non-Self

Implicit in what has been said is the idea that immediate knowledge has a two-fold reference: it is self knowledge and knowledge of the other. The latter is crucially important to action, for to act is to make a choice on the basis of a knowledge of the possibilities for action presented by the other upon which one acts. The basic form which this knowledge takes is a knowledge of the pattern of resistance to my action which the other presents to me.[15] Macmurray stresses that it really is knowledge in the true sense of the word that he is talking about.[16] Indeed he uses 'knowledge' to explicitly draw the contrast between animal consciousness - which may be discriminating but which acts within the organism as a part of its response to a stimuli - and human knowledge, which is an awareness of the other which discriminates possibilities of action, and thus engenders choice and the initiation of action.[17] This knowledge is said to be, in its reference to the other, objective knowledge, in the sense that it refers to an awareness of an object other than the self.[18] Objective knowledge is psychologically certain in a way in which theoretical knowledge can never be, for in action there is an immediate grasp of things and people which is wholly lacking in the theoretical.[19]

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[13] SA, pp.171-172.

[14] The 'other' as Macmurray uses it refers to all that is immediately known which is not the self.

[15] SA, p.166.

[16] SA, p.167.

[17] SA, p.167.

[18] SA, p.168.

[19] SA, p.168.

There is a twofold distinction to be made with regard to the self's knowledge of the other. On the one hand, the agent knows objects which are unlike itself, such as inanimate objects and animal life. Again, the agent knows other agents like itself.[20] Macmurray argues that the dynamics of these two types of knowledge are quite different. To know the non-personal other implies simply being aware of the determinate other, and making use of it as the context and means of fulfilling one's intentions. The non-personal other does not answer back, it is simply there for the agent's scrutiny and use. In contrast, knowledge of the personal other is a form of knowledge that can only arise in a mutual relationship between agents. That is, if agent A is to know agent B, then agent A must reveal himself to agent B, and agent B must reveal himself to agent A. If one of the pair refuses to engage in self revelation, then the relationship will break down, and mutual knowledge will be impossible. This means that interpersonal knowledge is only possible where each party intends to have a relationship, and therefore it is only possible where there is a harmony of intention.

S 1.7 Immediate Experience and Primitive Consciousness

Macmurray rules out the idea that immediate experience is part of an elementary stage of human life which is transcended; it is a constant feature of the human condition. Moreover, immediate experience develops and grows during a person's life. This growth will be dependent on many factors, but most importantly a person's immediate experience of life will grow in relation to thought. The human capacity to think about those things encountered in immediate experience enables agents to enrich that experience and so act more effectively. Thought allows this growth by defining items in the world, suggesting ways around problems, and so on, but it remains distinct from immediate experience.[21] The assumption here is that action is not caused by thought, but arises as an existential unity of intention and change. The consciousness associated with this unity is what Macmurray refers to as immediate experience.

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[20] John Macmurray, 'The Principle of Personality in Experience', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 29 (1928/29), 316-330.

[21] IU, pp.25-26.

S 1.8 The Unity of Experience

Macmurray argues that immediate knowledge is experienced by the agent as a unity.[22] By this Macmurray means that in action the primary awareness of the self is of the unfragmented nature of its own action, and of the integratedness of its own action with the world as a whole, and this leads on to the suggestion that the unity of the self's immediate experience can be thought of, equally, as the unity of the universe.

By referring to the unity of the self, Macmurray is pointing to the wholeness which characterises the self's actions. In action, the self uses all of its capabilities: movement, cognition and emotion.[23] In any action all these capabilities are employed, though, of course, the nature of the action concerned will determine the particular configuration of the employment of the self's capabilities. The unity of the self in action can be illustrated with reference to an everyday action such as painting a wall. In this action, the painter's movements and her knowledge are utilised in an integrated whole. So, the painter's primary knowledge is integrated with the movement of her hand up and down the wall. Again, both the moving and the knowing are suffused by feeling, for action as a whole is motivated by emotions such as interest, desire, love, or hate. This means that the painter's knowing is one with her interest in the wall, for there would be no knowledge of the wall unless the painter selected this wall as worthy of her interest, whilst the movement of the painter's hand cannot be separated from her desire to paint this wall.

The unity of the self in action can be contrasted with the fragmentation of the self's experience in reflection.[24] If the self's experience in action is marked by the interrelated utilisation of the self's various capabilities, then the self's experience in reflection is marked by the non-utilisation of the full panoply of the self's capabilities. This is to say, the self in reflection does not use all its capabilities to the full, for 'to think' is to tend in the direction of the suppression of the self's capacity for movement and emotion.[25]

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[22] IU, pp.26-27.

[23] IU, p.22.

[24] IU, p.24.

[25] IU, p.24.

The second aspect of the unity of immediate experience, is the unity of the world as it is experienced. In primary experience the world is experienced as one whole, it is experienced as 'an unbroken unity and continuity of being'.[26] The unity which is spoken of here can be illustrated with reference to space and time. In action the self's awareness of time is unproblematic, it is simply the awareness of the past and the future as they play a role in the present action.[27] The past is known in the form of memory, the future is anticipated. According to Macmurray, the concept of infinity is the reflective expression of the unbounded nature of time in action. Again, in action, space is also unproblematic. The spatial dimension is experienced by the acting self as simply the 'roominess' of the world, the unbounded possibility that the world yields for movement. According to Macmurray, within the space-time matrix the self experiences objects as items which have been selected for the self's attention, but which are nonetheless part of the whole in which they find their being. This is to say, in immediate experience there are no absolute distinctions between objects for they are all part of the integrated whole.[28] Thus, we might say that the 'unity of experience' refers to the wholeness that characterises the self's experience in any particular action.

Macmurray's notion of the unity of experience has important implications for theological epistemology. The 'unity' is premised on Macmurray's view that primary knowledge is found in action. At the very least this implies that, given the nature of action as a moving in the world, immediate experience and knowledge of God are ruled out. Given that we can only experience this world, then the existence of another world can never be established by experience, though we can imagine that it exists. This conclusion is strengthened by the 'unity of experience', for in that the self's primary experience is of a unified world in which it acts, then the possibility of the existence of another supernatural world is occluded. The postulation of another world which might be experienced would draw doubt on the unity

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[26] IU, p.29.

[27] IU, p.29.

[28] IU, p.30.

of the self's experience, and, in Macmurray's view, this is not plausible for the good reason that the unity of human experience is seen by him as the prerequisite of agency.

Macmurray argues that agency requires the postulation of the unity of experience. Agency is the capacity to act in terms of our knowledge of the other, and to have knowledge of our material environment, for Macmurray, is to understand individual items and states as systematically related to other aspects of the material universe. Thus, all agency implicitly assumes the unity of that universe which human beings experience. The concomitant of this is that human beings do not experience a non-material environment, for, on the one hand, agency includes, in principle, the assumption that we live in a transparently understandable world in which we can act in terms of the systematic relationship between those items and states which we encounter, whilst, on the other hand, the introduction of a non-material environment as a phenomenon which could be experienced would mean that we could not understand our environment as being systematically interrelated, for, and this seems to be Macmurray's basic assumption, the idea of a non-material transcendent realm is the idea of a sphere which cannot be known in a systematic way. For Macmurray, if we cannot understand systematically our environment, then we cannot act. But since we do in fact act, it follows that in immediate experience we are only aware of the one environment which is known as wholly one.

This conclusion has great significance for Macmurray's understanding of the idea of 'God'. It leads him to suggest that the idea of 'God' does not arise from an experience of a suprasensory reality, but from some wholly mundane dimension of the experience of the material environment.

S 1.9 Immediate Experience: An Evaluation

Macmurray's discussion of immediate experience provides an insight into the richness of human experience and a fertile way of understanding the relation between thought and everyday immediate experience. Moreover, Macmurray's analysis of the relation between reflective thought and immediate experience has significant implications for the understanding of religious belief, and it will provide the

philosophical underpinning for the position taken up in this thesis: that religious belief may be, in part, understood as a response to the day to day interaction with the environment.

One limitation of Macmurray's analysis of immediate experience is that he argues that agency is only concerned with effecting change in the material world. This means that there can only be immediate experience of the material world. This view may be too restrictive and Macmurray's position can be helpfully developed by the argument that human beings interact with, and, therefore, have an immediate experience of both a material and an immaterial environment.

S1.10 The Diversity of Human Experience

One of the gains of Macmurray's work is that he encourages an understanding of the diversity of human experience. Macmurray's work provides a valuable service in so far as it is a reminder that reflection is only one form of awareness which must be distinguished from other richer forms of awareness. Thus, for instance, Macmurray makes a useful distinction between reflective experience and interpersonal knowledge. Reflective experience aims at the elimination of all but the intellectual aspect of experience, whilst interpersonal experience draws upon the intellectual, emotional and practical capacities of human beings in a way that reflective experience does not. In comparison to reflection, interpersonal knowledge involves a relatively immediate relation to the not-self. In reflection the self takes up a passive relation to the not-self, whilst interpersonal knowledge involves an active relation to the not-self.

The distinctions which Macmurray highlights between reflective experience and those forms of experience which are characteristic of agency, reflect an important analytical distinction between two forms of experience and two forms of knowledge. As Macmurray points out, immediate experience and knowledge are quite distinct logically from reflective experience and knowledge, and that this is so is reflected in the fact that in common usage a recognisable distinction is made between that experience and knowledge found in the various modes of agency, such as in the practice of a sport, and the form of experience found in reflective activities. Ordinary language is not an infallible guide in analysis, but

ordinary usage should not be casually discounted for, all things being equal, it is probable that how things seem to most people is a reliable guide as to how they are.

Macmurray argues that reflection and agency are associated with distinct modes of consciousness, but he is also keen to point out that the two forms of consciousness are closely interrelated. For him, immediate experience is primary experience in the sense that it precedes and gives rise to reflection. There is much to commend in this point of view, for reflection is intentional, it is directed towards something which is known prior to reflection. In this sense there are good grounds for arguing, as Macmurray does, that there is a form of experience and knowledge which precedes reflection, and which arises from the active engagement of human beings with their environment. The confidence that people have that in reflection they are dealing with extra-mental realities, arises from their feeling of certitude that they interact with, and have knowledge of an extra-mental environment.

Macmurray argues that reflective thought arises from immediate experience, and he also maintains that reflection arises in order to fructify the knowledge which is found in agency. Thus, thought is said to be derived from immediate experience in order that agency might be informed by a more complete understanding of the environment with which it interacts. In Macmurray's view, the success of an action is dependent on the agent acting in terms of the true nature of that with which he interacts. It is in this respect that thought enables action, for thought aims to clarify that which is encountered in action. But though thought informs immediate experience, yet Macmurray is rightly insistent that reflective knowledge and immediate knowledge are logically distinguishable. In reflective experience, the intellectual capacity is turned in upon ideas and aims at their manipulation. In action, the intellectual capacity, informed by reflection, plays its part in the agent's engagement with the environment: it works in partnership with the emotions and the bodily movements of the agent.

S1.11 Macmurray's Limitation

The main problem with Macmurray's understanding of immediate and reflective experience, from a Christian perspective, arises from the limitations of his analysis of action. Though there is some

ambiguity it is clear that Macmurray argues that action involves change in the external world, or, at the very least, a change in the body of the actor.[29] This claim is of the utmost importance, for if action is to do with physical change it follows that immediate experience can only be of the material world.

It may be maintained that Macmurray is right to say that action involves change in the human environment. But it cannot be assumed that the agent only interacts with the material world. Indeed a typical Christian claim is that agents interact with an immaterial spiritual being as well as the material world, and that, in this sense, there may be immediate knowledge of the immaterial as well as the material.

S1.11.1 Change

It is justifiable to think of action as involving change of some kind. An action is an occasion when some change is wrought. Thus, when a person claims that they have acted typically the question which arises is 'what has been done to what'? To act is to do something, and in all doing there is an object to which something is done.

Sl.11.2 Change in the external environment

Macmurray is rightly adamant that change in the non-mental material world is a constituent aspect of action. One implication of this is that a change of mind cannot be thought of as an action. When 'action' is used in ordinary usage a change in the environment is implied. Thus, if I say, 'I moved my chair', I am claiming an action with two dimensions. I claim, firstly, that a chair has been moved, and, secondly, that I moved the chair by design. The importance of the external change can be demonstrated by attempting to remove it. In this case 'I moved the chair' would mean no more than I intended to move the chair. This statement could not be taken to indicate an action, for it would leave open the question of whether the chair had in fact been moved. Again, 'I moved the chair' could not be taken as simply an observation

[29] SA, p.128.

regarding the change in position of the chair; it can only be meaningful if it points to the source of that change in me.

One implication of the view that an action implies an external change is that mental activity, a change of mind, is not an action. 'Action' seems to most naturally refer to the doing of something to that which is extra-mental, it refers to interaction with the environment. When someone changes their mind they are not interacting with the anything, they are simply altering their own way of viewing the world; it is this fact that makes the use of 'action' seem odd if it is applied to mental activities.

S1.11.3 Action and the Immaterial Environment

Macmurray holds that there is only interaction with a material environment. It can, however, be argued that Macmurray's view is an unfortunate a priori rejection of a typical religious view: that we interact not only with the material, but also with the immaterial. Swinburne maintains in arguing for the 'principle of credulity' that, ceteris paribus, it is a rational principle to hold that what seems to be the case is probably the case.[30] A key strand of the Christian tradition and other religious traditions is that the environment is not only material but also immaterial, and that the immaterial environment discloses itself to human beings. There is, moreover, no reason in principle why people should not interact with an immaterial environment. It is a limitation of Macmurray's work that he neglects to give full weight to this widely held perception. Moreover, it will become apparent later on, that the main thrust of Macmurray's analysis of religion tends towards a view that is strangely at odds with his contention that we only interact with a material environment.

Macmurray's understanding of experience and reflection has significant implications for an understanding of religious belief. Macmurray holds that reflection arises out of the immediate encounter with the environment. The search for truth is an attempt to inform action with a fuller understanding of the environment with which it deals. Seen in this light, religious belief can be thought of as arising from

[30] Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, rev. edn (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), pp.254-276.

certain dimensions of the encounter with the environment; it aims to contribute to an understanding of the environment, which will enable more appropriate forms of action in response to the environment.

S2 The Aspiration to Fellowship

Immediate experience and knowledge are tied to agency. Since there is 'a blind urge towards reason' - 'it is that drive in us that makes us seek reality and be dissatisfied with illusions and unrealities in ourselves and in the world' - it follows that immediate experience is marked by the aspiration towards a true knowledge of the human environment.[31] Moreover, all agency includes the desire to realise fully the intention which is implicit in it. This is to say, agency is marked by the desire for freedom, and it follows that the awareness and knowledge which are part of all agency must be shaped by this desire. One of the conditions of freedom is, according to Macmurray, the existence of fellowship; it follows that the aspiration to fellowship is present in a nascent form in all immediate experience. Macmurray uses two distinct arguments to back up this thesis. On one hand, he maintains that an analysis of the development of the human capacity for knowledge and agency suggests that, from the beginning, there is an awareness that the good life lies in fellowship. Again, Macmurray argues that an analysis of agency itself leads to the conclusion that immediate experience is shaped by the problem of fellowship.

S2.1 The Development of Primary Knowledge

Macmurray argues that the existence of the infant, and its development as an agent occurs within the context of its relationship to its mother. 'Mother' here refers only to the person or persons who take chief responsibility for the welfare of the infant. Macmurray goes on to argue that, on the basis of the analysis of the early development of the child, it is possible to infer, firstly, that all human activity carries an inherent reference to the personal other, and that, secondly, from the earliest stages of human development there is an awareness that fellowship is the condition of human freedom and fulfilment. It

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[31] RE, p.29.

may be contended that Macmurray is right in his first inference, but that his second assertion requires development.

S2.2 The Early Existence of the Infant

In the absence of instinct the most distinctive thing is that the infant is born with the need and the capacity to be cared for and dependent on a parent.[32] For Macmurray, the details of this relation between the child and its parent are of the utmost importance. The first thing to notice is the child's capacity to express its experience to another.[33] An infant from its earliest days is able to do this as it communicates, in tears and happy chuckles, its feeling of being comfortable or uncomfortable. Macmurray designates this earliest form of awareness as motive consciousness, for it is constituted by an emotional response to its circumstances. In its earliest stages, the infant contributes to a personal relationship only its capacity for communicating its needs to its parent. It is the parent's responsibility to satisfy these needs, and the infant's development is characterised by its dependence on the care of the parent. Thus, the early experience of the infant is marked by dependence on a parent. The conclusion of this line of thought, is that an infant cannot be thought of as an individual, but only as 'one term in a personal relation'.[34] The use of 'personal' here requires some explanation. It is Macmurray's contention that human beings are personal by right of their relations with other human beings.[35] Thus, the personal quality of the infant's life lies in its capacity for communication with others.

S2.3 The Infant as Agent

Having argued that the infant's existence is constituted through its relation to its mother, Macmurray analyses the development of the infant. The purpose of this analysis is to show that not only in its initial existence is the infant dependent on a personal relation, but that its development as an acting being is also dependent on a personal relation. At this point a lacuna appears in Macmurray's logic. He

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[32] PR, p.50.

[33] PR, p.51.

[34] PR, p.50.

[35] PR, p.50.

maintains that the self is only existent as an agent. But the fact that he argues that the infant is not initially an agent might be thought to pose some problems for Macmurray. Is he implying that the infant is not a person? Moreover, if the infant is thought of as a person, does this not imply that it is not actually agency which differentiates the human person, but the capacity to communicate? Macmurray might argue that the infant is an agent in the sense that it has the potential for agency, and can only continue to exist in so far as this potential is developed. But the fact remains, that Macmurray's logic tends towards the identification of the capacity for communication as the logically prior aspect of human life.

Macmurray has argued that one key moment of action is intention. It is the presence of intention which demarcates the action from the event.[36] Moreover, to have an intention implies that the agent involved also has attentive knowledge. Attentive knowledge is the ability to grasp the possibilities of action, and intention is the choosing of one of these possibilities as against another. Thus, knowledge is a key dimension of action. It is in view of this importance, that we can understand the significance of Macmurray's contention that primary knowledge arises within the context of the relation of the infant with his mother.

Macmurray wishes to argue that the relation of mother to infant is at first constituted by the emotions of love and fear. It is these emotions which are the 'motivating consciousness' of the relation. Moreover, on the part of the infant, the early relation is wholly constituted by motive consciousness, for there is at this stage no knowledge nor action as such. Thus, the problem which Macmurray must pose himself is how to understand the development of knowledge out of the infant's motive consciousness. Macmurray wishes to state that the earliest form of the infant's motive consciousness involves a positive relation between love and fear. It is within this early motive consciousness, directed towards mother who responds to its needs, that the infant begins to develop, given the appropriate physiological developments, the ability to discriminate the other who responds to its cries. An important aspect of this first cognition is that it is a recognition of a relation which is constitutive of the infant's life from the

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[36] PR, p. 64.

beginning: it is the recognition of something of which it has already been aware, and this is because in any communication the presence of the other person is presupposed.[37] In Macmurray's view, then, the first cognitive act of the infant is the recognition of the other who gives care, and it is upon this basis that memory and expectation grow. That is, the recognition of the other who responds to the infant's cries enables the infant to build up a memory of fulfilled need, and an expectation that the past will be repeated in the future.[38] Thus cognition, from the first, is temporal in form because it is intimately related to action. Of course, the initial cognitions of the infant are very indiscriminate in the sense that the infant initially does not discriminate between the several people who offer their care. At the earliest stages, mother is anyone involved in offering help to the infant. As the cognitive capacities of the infant develop, however, the powers of discrimination develop such that the infant begins to distinguish between the significant other who is the principal carer, and those others who support the principal carer. A particularly important aspect of this process of discrimination, is the discrimination which the infant begins to make between people and things.[39] Initially, inanimate things are treated as personal, and it is only through a process of depersonalisation that things are singled out as those aspects of the non-self which do not respond to my call, and which do not move by themselves.

Macmurray contends that immediate knowledge has a dual aspect. Thus far we have seen how he attempts to argue that the knowledge of the non-self arises in the context of the infant's relation to its mother, we now see that self-consciousness also arises from the relation to the other. Macmurray explains the growth of self-consciousness as the outcome of the mother's attempts to encourage the infant to learn skills for itself. The mother does this by progressively refusing to meet all of the needs which the infant gives expression to.[40] A simple illustration of this would be the mother refusing, after a while, to spoon feed the baby in the hope that the baby would feed itself. Macmurray argues that the mother's withdrawal of support in this way will create a crisis on the part of the child. Prior to this phase the child's needs are met by the mother. In motivational terms, the mother's withdrawal leads to a

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[37] PR, p.76.

[38] PR, p.76.

[39] PR, pp. 81-82.

[40] PR, p.88.

negative motivational consciousness on the part of the infant who will feel unloved and anxious. This state of anxiety can only be overcome by an act of the mother freely offering love once again, and in this way re-establishing the positive relation between infant and carer. This pattern of withdrawal and return is, Macmurray thinks, a universal and crucially important part of all personal growth.[41] Moreover, it is in the moment of withdrawal that the infant develops self-awareness. In the moment of withdrawal the child suffers from anxiety due to the fact that its calls for assistance are not heard. The continuation of this situation leads to frustration, and the realisation of the difference between the infant and the mother. This is to say, the frustration that the child feels is accompanied by the development of will on the part of the child. Will is thought of as self-assertion, and it emerges in the infant as the demand that his needs be fulfilled. An aspect of the growth of self-assertion is the consciousness that grows in the infant of being an agent who is able to satisfy its own needs. Thus, self-consciousness grows in the withdrawal phase in which the child develops self-assertiveness. The infant's first cognition is of the other, self awareness grows out of this first cognition under certain circumstances. In Macmurray's view, the development which takes place in the withdrawal phase is not only an epistemological one: it is not simply the recognition of something that was a fact already. Instead, during the withdrawal phase there is the development of personal individuality in the infant.[42] In a real sense, there is no individual self before the withdrawal phase, for the infant's existence prior to the withdrawal phase is constituted by its dependent relation to its mother. It is only with the withdrawal phase that the infant develops self-identity. The novelty of Macmurray's work here may be brought out by contrasting it with that of the influential thinker René Descartes. As is well known, Descartes argued that the indubitable foundation of all knowledge is the existence of the human self as a thinking thing, for though most putative knowledge can be doubted, the existence of the thinking self which is the doubter cannot be doubted.[43] Moreover, for Descartes the indubitability of the thinking self suggests that thinking is the essential property of the human self; the essential self is not body but mind.[44] In this way Descartes argues that human beings are essentially solitary thinking selves. In contrast, Macmurray's view is that the logically

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[41] PR, p.90.

[42] PR, pp.94-95.

[43] René Descartes, *A Discourse in Method*, trans. by John Veitch (London: Dent, 1912), p.89.

[44] Descartes, pp.87-89.

primary truth is that human beings are born as dependent terms in personal relations and that they are only subsequently constituted as thinking selves.

Several important points can be made with reference to the withdrawal phase. This phase is critical to personal development. As the infant is forced to do for itself what mother is refusing to do it begins to learn new skills. Thus, the withdrawal phase leads to the development of the skills that make for self-sufficiency. Another aspect of great importance, is that within the withdrawal phase lie the roots of the distinctions between good and bad, illusion and reality. Macmurray argues, that the infant's frustration with its mother's refusal to meet its requests for satisfaction arises from the fact that its expectations have proved to be ill-founded. As we have seen, the first cognition of the infant involves a knowledge of the other which includes an expectation of satisfaction in the future. Thus, the first cognition involves the development of imagination, which is the ability to picture what the future will be like. With this in mind, it is now clear that it is the child's imaginative efforts which are frustrated in the withdrawal phase.[45] Thus, there arises the awareness of the distinction between imagination and perception, or what is imagined and what actually happens. Moreover, the child's awareness of the distinction between truth and falsity is related to the awareness of the distinction between good and bad. What is good is what the child expects will happen, whilst what is bad is the frustration of that expectation. Further, in all this is it important to bear in mind that the development of the distinctions between good and bad and true and false arise within the context of the struggle of wills between the child and the mother. These distinctions arise within the context of the practical relation between the child and his mother, which leads to the conclusion that the latter, the distinction between doing right and doing wrong, is the primary distinction, and that the matter of truth and falsity is derivative.[46] From the perspective of action, the awareness of the distinction between doing well and doing badly is crucial. This is because action involves choice, and the function of knowledge in action is to enable choice by delineating the possibilities of future action. Choice involves choosing between different possibilities for action, and such choice must ultimately involve the distinction between choosing between the right and the wrong.

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[45] PR, p.96.

[46] PR, p.97.

S2.4 Two Inferences

On the basis of his analysis of the child's early development, Macmurray suggests two important inferences, though it must be said that he does not himself clearly distinguish the two inferences from one another. Macmurray's first inference is summed up in the following passage:

> In the human infant - and this is the heart of the matter - the impulse to communication is his sole adaptation to the world into which he is born. Implicit and unconscious it may be, yet it is sufficient to constitute the mother-child relation as the basic form of human existence, as a personal mutuality, as a 'You and 1' with a common life. For this reason the infant is born a person and not an animal. All his subsequent experience, all the habits he forms and the skills he acquires fall within this framework, and are fitted to it. Thus, human experience is, in principle, shared experience; human life, even in its most individual elements, is a common life; and human behaviour carries always, in its inherent structure, a reference to the personal Other. [...] The personal is constituted by personal relatedness. The unit of the personal is not the '1', but the 'You and 1'.[47]

Macmurray's argument is that since human activity is based on the capacity to communicate with and learn from others, not instinct, then all human activity must reflect the dependence of the individual on his fellows. All human activity, even that of a Robinson Crusoe, is shaped by that which is learned in and through an individual's relation to the personal other. Macmurray makes an important and valid point here. Whilst it is no doubt true that instinct plays a larger role in human activity than Macmurray allows, yet it is also true that given the importance of communication and especially language in human activity, human knowing and activity presuppose a relation to the personal other. One implication of this is that the posing of the question of the existence of others is formally inappropriate for, if Macmurray is correct, self-knowledge presupposes a relation to the personal other. Also, if it is true that all human experience and knowledge presuppose a relation to the personal other, it seems reasonable to argue that human beings are so essentially social, that any account of an ideal human condition must include an emphasis on the quality of the relationships which human beings have together. This is only a very general point, for from the mere fact that human knowledge and experience presuppose a relation to the personal other, one cannot logically infer any necessary specific conclusions about the ideal human state.

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[47] PR, p.68.

The second inference which Macmurray draws from his analysis of the development of the infant, is that from the earliest stages of the development of human consciousness there is a nascent awareness that human fulfilment is found in close human relationships. It can be argued that Macmurray is making a useful point here, for most people will have an enduring if tacit memory of their early childhood as a happy time, characterised by the love and trustworthiness of their mother. The enduring memory of childhood will be, for most people, one of a condition in which their needs were met within the context of a loving relationship. In this sense, Macmurray may be right to argue that childhood leaves most with an intuitive sense that well-being is to be found in loving relationships with others. Moreover, if childhood leaves an enduring memory, it may also leave an aspiration towards the conditions which pertained in childhood.

As far as personal development is concerned, Macmurray suggests that as human beings emerge into consciousness, they emerge into an 'original unity' which is constituted by 'a relation of persons'.[48] What Macmurray means, is that the awareness which characterises the infant in the first stages of development, is marked by a sense of dependence upon, identity with and love for its mother. At this stage there is no distinction between what the infant imagines will occur, the fulfilment of all its needs, and what will in fact happen; this is the reason why the infant does not at first develop self-identity.

According to Macmurray, the original unity of consciousness which marks the young infant's life must be broken if development is to take place. In abstract terms, the original unity of consciousness must be fragmented in order that the unity of the personal life may be reconstituted at a higher, more differentiated level; Macmurray's conceptual framework at this point is reminiscent of the biblical pattern of creation, fall and redemption.

In Macmurray's view, the original awareness of the child is characterised by a growing knowledge of the personal other who cares for it. Moreover, the infant's immediate knowledge of mother coalesces with

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[48] PR, p.69.

the memory of mother's regular fulfilment of its needs in the past, and this memory is the basis of 'a positive attitude of confidence' that its need in the future will be met also.[49] The fact that at this stage the child's expectations of the future are met, is the basis for the positive motivation which the child's activities reveal. In its original state of consciousness, the child's activities are shaped by a confidence and sense of oneness with the personal other: the infant is motivated by love which, at this stage, subordinates fear.[50]

The original unity of the child's experience is broken up by the child's expectations being confounded:

> In the earliest stages of our life [...] [the] reversal of the natural dominance of the positive motive is occasional and accidental. It foreshadows however a periodic reversal which is necessary and inevitable in passing from one stage to the next. If a child is to grow up, he must learn, stage by stage, to do for himself what has up to that time been done for him by the mother. But at all the crucial points, at least, the decision rests with the mother, and therefore it must take the form of a deliberate refusal on her part to continue to show the child those expressions of her care for him that he expects.[51]

With the frustration of its expectations the child is thrown into activity dominated by fear:

> Activity becomes egocentric, concerned with the defence of himself in a world which is indifferent to his needs, a world which acts in mysterious ways of its own, paying no attention to his desires.[52]

In Macmurray's view, it is during the phases in which mother withdraws that a child begins to develop self identity, self will, and the skills which are needed to do for himself what mother refuses to do for him. It is in this sense that the withdrawal phase is a necessary and on-going part of personal development. However, the stage of withdrawal is marked by 'a general anxiety which, if it were to

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[49] PR, p.87.

[50] PR, p.88.

[51] PR, pp.88-89.

[52] PR, p.89.

become permanent, must pass into despair'.[53] The cause of the child's anxiety is the awareness that, in the withdrawal stage, its relationship to its mother 'in which he has his being' is fractured: he is fearful that his mother does not love him any more. Corresponding to the anxiety which the child feels, there is present in the awareness of the child an aspiration to overcome the negative phase and restore the positive relation to his mother; though since the relational breakdown has been caused by mother, it can only be restored by a gracious restatement by the mother of her love and care.[54]

The most basic characteristic of the negative phase of the child's development is that it involves a conflict of wills. On the basis of past experience, the child imagines the satisfaction of its needs and covets this end.[55] The refusal of the other to meet its needs leads the child to develop an awareness of its own will and of being in conflict with the will of the other. In turn, the awareness of the conflict of wills gives rise to the awareness of the distinctions between good and bad, true and false and imagination and reality.

According to Macmurray, the anger and fear which marks the onset of the negative phase of the child's development, is related to his memory of the original unity of persons:

> In his fear for himself he is angry with her and hates her. Yet this hate and anger depend upon his need of her love, and his memory of the time when he and she loved one another.[56]

The anger and anxiety that mark the negative phase arise from the child's primal memory of having its needs satisfied and living in fellowship with its mother. Moreover, the primal memory of fellowship means that:

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[53] PR, p.89.

[54] PR, p.90.

[55] PR, p.95.

[56] PR, p.97.

> The situation in which he finds himself, and the state of mind into which he is come, is one which is dreadful to him and from which he needs to escape.[57]

Macmurray has many useful insights into the process by which the negative phase may be overcome, but what concerns us here is that Macmurray holds that a universal aspect of immediate experience is the felt awareness, based on memory, that the self can only be fulfilled in fellowship:

> The inherent object - the reality of the relationship - is the full mutuality of fellowship in a common life, in which alone the individual can realize himself as a person.[58]

If there is a universal, immediate awareness that fellowship is the context of human fulfilment, then it follows that this awareness must be the motivating consciousness which drives human efforts towards fellowship. Thus, if religion is the reflective effort to establish fellowship, then it takes it cue from the immediate awareness, inherent in the structure of human development, that humans can only thrive in fellowship.

Macmurray's analysis shows the extent to which the self, from the first, is dependent on the personal other. Macmurray holds that the process of child development shows that the child is born into a fellowship of persons and that this beginning is a blueprint for human fulfilment as a whole. At this point, Macmurray's work requires some development. Macmurray defines a fellowship as a relation or network of relations where each person is motivated by love: each person is concerned for the other and not for himself/herself. But, and this is a point which Macmurray tends to overlook, the relation between a child and its parent(s) is not a fellowship in this sense. Rather, the infant's concern, as Macmurray himself shows, is with the fulfilment of its own needs and in this way the infant is from the beginning egocentrically motivated. In so far as the infant does love its parent(s), its love is best characterised as 'need love': it is the love of the dependent for the supplier of that which she needs. Need love may be distinguished from agape and it is, in Macmurray's view, selfless love which

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[57] PR, p.97.

[58] PR, p.105.

characterises fellowship. The distinction between the relation of parent and child, and the relation which exists in an adult fellowship leads to the observation that whilst the experience and memory of childhood may motivate the search for fellowship on the part of adults, yet it cannot be argued that childhood provides the blueprint for fellowship. The most that can be said is that the relation of parent to child may anticipate the full development of fellowship as found in an adult relation of mutual love.

One problem with Macmurray's tendency to see in childhood the blueprint for human well-being, is that it does not take into full account that adults may hold a multiplicity of ends as intrinsically good, and that some of these ends may be in conflict with fellowship as Macmurray understands it. This suggests that there is no logical reason for arguing that the condition of the infant's happiness is the highest good for all human beings. Nor are there empirical or logical grounds for holding that there is one ultimate human good which unifies all subordinate human goods. Indeed, Berlin has shown that there are empirical grounds for holding that some of the things which are held as having intrinsic value are incompatible with each other.[59] That Macmurray holds that, in principle, there is a state of unified well-being towards which human aspire, suggests that his work is not only an impartial analysis of the evidence; it is implicitly putting forward a religious, or more accurately, a Christian understanding of the nature and fulfilment of human life. Macmurray's analysis does not show that a positive, altruistic sense of fellowship is a logically necessary condition of human fulfilment. What Macmurray does show is that the great value which the Christian faith places on fellowship has roots in some of the earliest experiences of human life, for the aspiration to fellowship may be thought of as arising from and the development of the tacit childhood memory of the happiness associated with the experience of a loving and trusting relationship.

S2.5 The Three-fold Problem of Knowledge

Beyond the attempt to root fellowship in the structure of human development, Macmurray also has an argument which suggests that there is a universal awareness of the need for fellowship which arises from

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[59] Isaiah Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1958), pp.6-19.

the problems which any agent must overcome if she is to act freely. According to Macmurray, in that action implies choice between acting well and acting badly, then any agent faces a threefold problematic of knowledge.[60] In the first place, the agent is faced with establishing satisfactory ends and this involves the discrimination between satisfactory and unsatisfactory ends. In Macmurray's view such a discrimination is the field of aesthetic knowledge, which is a form of thinking which aims at the discrimination of the ideal, in the light of which all other goods can be ordered. Secondly, the agent must choose the appropriate means to the achievement of the ends which are intended, and this is the sphere of scientific thinking in the broadest sense.[61] So, if agents are to act freely they must act for worthwhile ends and with efficient means. Thus, the initial problematic of human freedom is the identification of worthwhile ends and efficient means. If, as is always the case, an agent's action is based on a limited knowledge in either sphere then agency will be frustrated, for if the agent acts according to inadequate means or with an inadequate goal, then the practical determination of the world will not be as was intended, and therefore her action reflects a lack of freedom for, in Macmurray's view, the freedom to act is the freedom to determine the future as one intends to do so. This means that when an agent acts on the basis of an inadequate knowledge of the other, then she is not acting in terms of the nature of the other.

Thirdly, acting freely is not merely a matter of identifying adequate ends and means. These are necessary but not sufficient conditions of acting freely. The third and most important condition of freedom arises from the fact that we act in a world which we share with other agents. Since agents interact with other agents, then the possibility of our acting freely is dependent on the cooperation of others. In a negative sense this cooperation would involve others allowing an agent to act; in a positive sense it would involve others cooperating with an agent to achieve shared goals. Thus, the basic condition of the freedom of the agent to act is the attainment of a knowledge of others.[62] Personal knowledge arises as part of a mutual relationship with another person, and such a relationship can only be grounded upon a disposition or motive to act in love towards the other; it is upon this ground that

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[60] PR, p.210.

[61] PR, p.211.

[62] PR, p.212.

mutual self-revelation can develop. Notice here that personal knowledge involves a certain way of being towards the other, and it is in this sense that Macmurray's analysis of the problematic of action goes beyond a pragmatic approach to the question of how conflicts between agents can he resolved. In Macmurray's view, the problem of acting freely in a world in which we are dependent on others, is not ultimately a problem of conflict management, but a problem of transforming the motives which shape the intentions of agents.

The discussion above has brought to light some interesting aspects of Macmurray's discussion of immediate knowledge. One thing that it has highlighted is that the awareness of the other in action has a threefold aspect: it involves the question of appropriate ends, which is the realm of the feelings; it is concerned with the identification of appropriate means to the fulfilment of our ends, which is a function of the intellect; and it also involves the establishing of positive relations with other agents so that each agent can act freely. These interests are essential to human existence considered as action, and they shape the immediate awareness which is part of action.

Macmurray makes one very significant assumption, and this is that agents are 'naturally' orientated towards freedom. If this were not so then the case for the universality of the three interests would be so much weaker. Macmurray's view of freedom seems to be the Aristotelian one, which suggests that human happiness and freedom is found in the ability to express one's essential nature.[63] Just as it is the stone's nature to fall to the ground if dropped, so it is that the agent's happiness and freedom lies in determining the future according to her own intentions. This means that the agent is free when able to act freely, and this is not an analytic statement in so far as it is possible to define freedom in other ways. Thus, for instance, a Buddhist might view freedom as being liberated from the desire to impose one's will on the world. Macmurray wishes to argue that freedom is dependent on the agent acting in terms of the other, which is to say that to act freely the agent must act in terms of a 'real' knowledge of the other. This means that agents can only be free if their intentions are in harmony with those of other agents, if their intentions are worthwhile, and if the means that they select to fulfil their intentions are efficient.

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[63] John Hospers, *An Introduction to Philosophical Analysis*, 3rd edn (London: Routledge, 1990), p.127.

Thus, agents only act freely when they act on the basis of a complete knowledge of the personal other (i.e. in communion), a perfect knowledge of what is worthwhile, and an adequate knowledge of appropriate means. The point is, these three forms of knowledge are universal human interests only in so far as there is a universal human interest in acting freely.

In his discussion of the threefold problem of action, Macmurray provides much valuable illumination. It is an analytical truth that any action aims at the realisation of an intention. It follows that the problem of agency is the problem of overcoming those aspects of human experience which inhibit the realisation of a person's ends. Macmurray identifies three types of problem which each agent faces: identifying appropriate ends and means and managing his relations with others. As a broad brush analysis of those factors which inhibit agency Macmurray's work is helpful, though it is not clear, on the one hand, that the three problems which he identifies are exhaustive, nor, on the other hand, does Macmurray make sufficiently clear that the problems which he speaks of are very different from one another; a detailed analysis would have to look into these differences at some length.

Alongside his thesis that there are three problems of agency, Macmurray also holds that there are three forms of knowledge which all agents seek. According to Macmurray, the form of knowledge which corresponds to the problem of the personal is that form found in fellowship. Thus does Macmurray argue, that the structure of agency itself throws up and reinforces the aspiration to fellowship. Macmurray's work at this point is somewhat injudicious. It may be valid to argue that a universal problem of agency is that of managing human relationships for the reasons Macmurray gives. But there may be and are a variety of ways in which the problem of human relationships have been handled. Thus, for instance, human relationships may be regulated through contractual agreements. Again, human relationships may be organised around traditions and accepted patterns of hierarchy. This observation leads to the conclusion that Macmurray's achievement lies, not in demonstrating that the structure of agency generates the necessity for fellowship, but in showing that there is a demonstrable rationale

behind the Christian argument that the ideal human life includes fellowship with other human beings.[64] In so far as the problem of handling our relations with others is a universal and arguably the most difficult problem of agency, Macmurray's work shows that Christian fellowship is one reasonable response to a basic problem of human life.

The Nature of Experience: Conclusion and Evaluation

One of the important contributions of Macmurray's discussion of immediate experience, is that it shows an appreciation of the diverse nature of human experience. The distinction between reflective and lived experience is an important one. Moreover, it would be possible to develop Macmurray's insight by distinguishing between the variety of forms of lived experience which Macmurray tends to lump together. Thus, it would be possible to analyse immediate experience into 'how to' experience, valuational experience, personal experience and so on. In this regard, Macmurray's analysis of personal knowledge is an important contribution to our understanding of what it is to know another person.

The distinction between lived and reflective experience is also crucial to an understanding of the relationship between religious belief and ordinary experience. It has been argued that reflective experience arises from the attempt to think about that which has been encountered in immediate experience. Macmurray holds that there is within immediate experience a necessary aspiration to fellowship, and, as we will see, he maintains that this is the ground of religious reflection; it is the attempt to realise the ideal of fellowship which is implicit in human life. It has been maintained that Macmurray goes too far in arguing that there is implicit in human experience an aspiration to mutually loving fellowship. This observation has led to the conclusion that there are certain elements of human experience, the early experiences of the child and the problem of the personal, which give rise to the

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[64] David Wright makes the point that the value placed on fellowship is not a premiss of Christianity, but a conclusion arrived at on theological grounds. David Wright, 'Review of 'Conditions of Freedom'', *Philosophical Quarterly* (1950-1951), 286.

search for fulfilling and satisfactory human relationships, but that the fellowship model which Macmurray puts forward is influenced by a specifically Christian response to these facets of human experience. This is to say, the high value which Christianity puts on human fellowship is a response to, but is not determined by those facets of immediate experience with which Macmurray is concerned.

Chapter 3

John Macmurray: the Experiential Ground and Function of Religious Belief

Macmurray argues that reflective experience arises from immediate experience. This chapter will examine this thesis, and, in particular, its implications for religious activity. The chapter will begin by discussing Macmurray's general understanding of reflective thought: its nature, its genesis, its salient characteristics, the processes by which it is scrutinised, and its modalities.

The second section will take up the issue of religious reflection more directly. It will be shown that, in Macmurray's view, religion arises from the problem of establishing and maintaining loving community in the face of the perennial danger of fear becoming the dominating motivation in the life of individuals and communities. Macmurray holds that religious reflection functions through the symbolic representation, in ritual and doctrine, of the community. Through such symbolic representation religion aims to encourage a positive, loving motivation on the part of individuals and societies.

The third section of the chapter will offer a critical assessment of Macmurray's theory of religion. It will be argued that Macmurray is right to hold that religious belief can be understood as an attempt to resolve a critical problem concerning human well-being thrown up by ordinary experience. Moreover, it will be suggested that Macmurray is insightful when he argues that a religious view typically holds that the resolution of the primary religious problem enables the resolution of other endemic and pressing human problems; this is the case because these other problems are taken as derivative of the ultimate problem with which religion is concerned. In this sense, Macmurray's approach suggests that religion is

concerned with the theoretical and practical resolution of all those factors which inhibit human well-being.

Yet, whilst there is a great deal that can be positively affirmed in Macmurray's work, there are points where modification and development is required. Macmurray argues that religion qua religion is a response to the problem of the personal. Against this it will be contended, on the one hand, that the logic of Macmurray's own work is somewhat at odds with this conclusion, and, on the other, his analysis is not fully adequate so far as Christianity is concerned.

Again, it will be maintained that there are difficulties in Macmurray's view that authentic religious belief is primarily the articulation of that which is integral to ordinary experience. Whilst Christian belief may be treated as responses to dimensions of ordinary experience, and no doubt religious beliefs are partly shaped by that which is encountered in ordinary experience, yet religious belief is not wholly determined by ordinary experience in the sense in which Macmurray understands this; religious belief is shaped by the interaction of the religious tradition and its transcendent dimension with ordinary experience.

S1 Reflective Thought

Macmurray sees reflection as arising out of immediate knowledge, and it arises when the immediate knowledge of an agent is inadequate to allow freedom of action. Thus, reflection arises in response to a breakdown in action. The joiner coming across a new problem in his joinery may stop and think for a moment in order to overcome the problem. This illustration conveys the essence of what it is to think and, in this respect, Macmurray's position is similar to that of philosophical pragmatists such as Pierce,

James and Dewey, for he shares with the them the view that thought arises from and finds its meaning in action.[1]

Action, according to Macmurray, involves a three-fold problematic, and it is this problematic which ensures that 'thinking about' is an essential part of all human life. We think because we act, and because our action poses us problems of knowledge. If thinking is a response to the failure of immediate knowledge, then this suggests that reflective knowledge is an attempt to extend and improve the agent's fragmentary knowledge. Of course, reflective thinking only ever produces knowledge with a provisional status, for theoretical knowledge is only a more or less adequate representation of the other.

S1.1 The Derivation of Reflective Activity

Macmurray's understanding of reflective knowledge is that it is rooted in memory.[2] More particularly, in the act of reflection the knowledge found in memory is isolated from its natural context in action, and it is manipulated through reflective thought. Thus, for Macmurray, reflection does not give rise to knowledge of the not-self, it is the manipulation of the knowledge of the not-self which is generated in agency. Formally speaking, reflection involves agents ceasing to act in order to focus their efforts on reflecting about that which they have encountered in action.

A fuller characterisation of the ground of reflection in agency can be arrived at through a consideration of the relation between attention and intention in action.[3] Macmurray holds that the agent relates to the other in intention, which is the attempt to determine a certain change in the other, and in attention, which is the reflective mode found in action by which the self ascertains the features of the determinate other so as to enable intention. Thus, attention and intention refer to the two aspects of the self's knowledge of the other in action. In reflection, humans are developing the attention that is part of their

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[1] Thomason, *The Empirical Basis of Religion*, pp. 125-157.

[2] SA, p.170.

[3] SA, pp.171-172.

knowledge in action. They are doing something but it is not acting, for it is only attending to a determinate object and not seeking to change or modify it.

S1.2 Some Characteristics of Reflection

Reflection is regarded as attention in thought and there are various general characteristics of such reflection that can be identified. Reflective thought varies according to the intensity of interest with which it is undertaken, and also according to those aspects of the determinate other which are selected for attention. The selectivity of reflection corresponds to the selectiveness of the agent's attention in action, which is, in turn, determined by the intention which the agent has. Moreover, the agent's attention is taken up with those aspects of the other which are unpredictable, for the self responds to the predictable elements of the other upon which it acts through habitual responses.[4]

S1.3 Thought as Symbolic Representation

Macmurray holds that a common feature of all thought is that it depends on the symbolic representation of that which is absent, the other. In so far as thought arises in response to a failure of action it must by nature be symbolic, for the function of thought is to symbolise that which is encountered in action in such a way as to allow action to resume.[5] It follows that thought is not meaningful if it does not intend to symbolise elements of the other as appropriated in agency.

Thought symbolises the other in images, and these images are the work of the imagination as it manipulates perceptions. The imagination enables reflective thought by constructing symbols with which to represent that which is given in immediate experience. One key symbol is, of course, language itself which has its public and private forms in words and ideas.

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[4] SA, p.173.

[5] IU, p.39.

In Macmurray's understanding, the function of the reflective disciplines is the manipulation of the symbolic representations of the other, in language and other modes of representation, in order to overcome practical problems. There are two forms which such manipulation will take. Firstly, a thinker may map out or describe that aspect of reality which is the focus of interest. Mapping, in Macmurray's view, involves the arrangement of symbols in relation to a functional need. This is to suggest that all mapping is selective in nature, so that the value of any description must be assessed in terms of adequacy rather than truth or falsity.[6]

The second form of reflective thought involves the manipulation of the data, provided by mapping, in judgements and inferences. Macmurray is keen to emphasise that such manipulation is not simply a matter of the application of certain rules, for it is the work of the imagination.

Macmurray holds that the function of thought is to allow the resumption of action, but thought will only be successful in this respect if it proceeds within the appropriate conceptual framework. The production of such a framework involves the symbolic representation of the general features of a reality, and the organisation of these symbols in order to reveal the form of that reality. According to Macmurray, the unity pattern or logical form which is used in any situation will be determined by the subject matter under discussion. When ideas are developed within the appropriate unity pattern there can be the expectation that they will really bear on the practical questions at issue.

S1.4 The Verification of Thought

Springing from Macmurray's affirmation of the functional nature of thought, comes the need for the verification of thought in the realm of activity. Given his premises, Macmurray maintains that thought will be verified or otherwise in practical activity, which is to say that the success of thought is related to its ability to have a positive impact on practice. That is, thought is to be tested by the simple expedient of acting on the implications, implicit or explicit, contained in any theoretical conclusion. By acting on

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[6] IU, p.55.

the basis of the conclusions of reflection, it ought to be possible to discover whether the process of reflection promotes successful action or not. Of course, the question of the success of thought will be related to the problem from which it arose in the first instance. Macmurray emphasises that the verification of thought in action is never conclusive, for human theoretical knowledge is always hypothetical. Nevertheless, with the verification of a thought the rationality of that idea and the subsequent activity is maintained.[7]

S1.5 Reflection and Action

In Macmurray's estimation the polarity of action and reflection are both essential elements of everyday life.[8] This point must be emphasised as against the criticism of those who tend to see Macmurray as disparaging the intellectual life.[9] On the contrary, Macmurray is keen to emphasise that the normal business of living involves the "rhythm of withdrawal and return" which includes the movement between reflection and action.[10] Thus, for instance, in the work of the artist there is typically a movement back and forward between painting the picture and reflecting upon the next step. In the process of painting, the artist has an immediate knowledge of the other and of what is being done through touch and sight, but this knowledge requires to be extended if the painting is to be satisfactorily completed. Moreover, the need for reflection is more often than not occasioned by the appearance of a practical problem, arising perhaps from a failure of technique.

S1.6 The Status of the Theoretical

Thus far, the discussion has tended to focus on the action of the individual, and the awareness that is found in it, and the relation of this awareness to reflection. But, of course, actions take place within 'activities' which combine reflection and action. Macmurray wishes to classify these activities as either theoretical or practical. The defining feature here is the question of the intention that unites an activity. In a practical activity, the intention that unites action and thought is concerned with a change in the

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[7] IU, p.65.

[8] SA, p.181.

[9] Roy, *The Form of the Personal*, p.77.

[10] SA, p.181.

other. In a theoretical activity, the intention that unites action and thought aims at the development of ideas. In Macmurray's view, a theoretical activity is justifiable, but ultimately all theoretical activity must find its meaning (justification) in action.

S1.7 The Modes of Reflection

It is Macmurray's view that just as immediate knowledge is disrupted by three problematics of action - the problem of ends, means and human alienation - so the three basic modes of reflection - art, science, and religion - correspond to these basic problems.[11] One mode of reflection is concerned with valuation.[12] This is a mode of reflection which depends upon feeling (or intuition), in the sense that it relates to the other in terms of feeling. Feeling is that which initiates and ends actions, for the feeling of dissatisfaction with a state of affairs initiates action, and the feeling of satisfaction with a state of affairs will bring an action to an end. Valuational reflection involves the attempt to identify those states of affairs which will bring satisfaction and are of intrinsic worth.

Another mode of reflection is that which emerges from the search for the means of fulfilling one's ends. The interest underlying this mode of reflection gives rise to a search for impersonal knowledge. That is, this mode of reflection has no concern with value, it aims at a knowledge of the facts about the other, for such knowledge can be used to identify the most efficient means by which the ends of the agent can be achieved.

According to Macmurray, the pure forms of these two modes of reflection are found in science and art. Science is the pure form of that reflective mode that looks for an impersonal knowledge of the world. The scientific methodology involves generalisation: it aims at a general impersonal knowledge which can be of use in determining efficient means in action.

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[11] SA, pp.191-192.

[12] SA, p.193.

Art is the pure form of the mode of reflection which aims at establishing true value. Art seeks a particularising knowledge of some aspect of the other. The goal of art is contemplation of the perfect as expressed in a particular representation. Moreover, art offers a more complete form of knowledge than science, for it is concerned with things in themselves, and not simply with the generalisable features of entities. Further, the primacy of the artistic mode of reflection is emphasised by the fact that we may derive the scientific from the artistic, but not the latter from the former.[13] The artistic is, in this sense, more objective, for it is concerned with the adequate discrimination of the object itself, and not of the object as a means to an end.[14]

Macmurray's general view of the two modes of reflection, art and science, is that they are parallel and that there is no material difference between them. Both the intellectual and the emotional are responses to the object; they are activities of the agent and verified in practice. The only difference between science and art is that the verification of a value is generally far more personally costly than that of an idea, for to verify a value one has to attempt to live by it, whilst the verification of an idea is a purely theoretical matter.[15] Further, both art and science along with religious reflection may be treated as rational activities. This is because that which differentiates the human from the animal, is the capacity to act in terms of knowledge of the object. This being the case, all the reflective activities, in that they are undertaken in order to enable action, are dimensions of the rationality of the agent.[16] Moreover, Macmurray argues that since 'the mutuality of human beings is the central fact of human experience', then that mode of reflection which is directly related to this fact - religion - is the primary mode of reflection.[17] For Macmurray, religion is the primary mode of human reflection, and art and science are derived from it. In a community people will seek ways of securing their common ends, and this activity gives rise to the search for the most effective means of achieving one's ends, that is, scientific thought. Again, within a community it is natural for the members of the community to appreciate and enjoy each

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[13] SA, p.200.

[14] SA, p.201.

[15] SA, p.202.

[16] PR, p.167.

[17] SRE, p.56.

other, and this is the root of the artistic mode of reflection. But the establishing of mutually agreed ends and the identification of the means of attaining these ends is dependent upon the existence of community. For, where people are fearful of one another then there cannot be agreement on ends and means. Thus, religion, which is that form of reflection which aims to enable community, is the primary form of human reflective rationality, and this point is confirmed, says Macmurray, by the historical fact that science and art emerge from the religious.

S2 Religion as a Form of Reflection

S2.1 The Root of Religious Reflection

Macmurray affirms the empiricist idea that the modes and content of reflection can be traced, ultimately, to some aspect of the immediate experience of the agent in action:

> The scientist, the artist, and the religious man all must start from a range of experience which is common to all men everywhere, even though it is true perhaps, that only a few have the capacities which are necessary to produce the transformation that creates religion or art or science.[18]
>
> The reflective activities have their meaning, in their reference to the practical world.[19]

As has been said, Macmurray holds that reflection arises when attention is given to the memory of the other gained in action. Thus, the roots or stimulus of religious reflection lie in some aspect(s) of the memory of the agent. Macmurray suggests that religion has three distinct, but interrelated roots in the agent's immediate experience. Macmurray identifies the first root of religious reflection in the following way:

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[18] SRE, p.15.

[19] RAS, p.47.

> The field of religion is the field of personal relations, and the datum from which religious reflection starts is the reciprocity or mutuality of these. Its problem is the problem of communion or community.[20]

Macmurray points out that the relationship which a person has with other persons is quite different from that which he might have with things. Persons can value and use things as they wish, but they cannot value and treat other human beings as they wish, for the freedom of their actions with reference to other human beings is dependent on those others allowing them so to act. Personal relations are problematic because they are reciprocal - two sided, which is to say, that they give rise to 'the problem of personal relationship; the problem of conflict and enmity, of estrangement and reconciliation'.[21] The reciprocity of personal relations means that achieving satisfactory personal relations is the key problem of human existence, and it is from this problem that religion arises and to which it relates.[22] Moreover, since the 'problem of the personal' is a universal fact of human existence, it 'follows that religion is an inseparable component of human life and always must be'.[23]

Secondly, agents have a memory, however inchoate, of the original unity into which they were born. As has been seen, for Macmurray, the original unity of mother and child is constituted by a loving relation in which each gives themselves to the other. Implicit in the awareness of the original unity, even at its most elementary stage, there is the knowledge that a personal unity constituted by love is the highest good, for in such a context the child enjoys the fulfilment of all its needs. Macmurray argues, then, that at the very root of human consciousness there is an awareness of the context and nature of human fulfilment, and it is in this regard that Macmurray mischievously suggests that Freud's argument that religion is the 'projection' of the child's experience upon the wider society may have a lot to commend it.[24] For, the approximation of human society to the family ideal is the approximation of human society to a truly human form of existence.

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[20] SRE, p.30.

[21] RAS, p.54.

[22] RAS, p.53.

[23] SRE, p.34.

[24] PR, pp. 154-155.

The third root of religious reflection is the awareness, which also arises in the elementary stages of human development, that the highest good is continually threatened by the incursion of fear as a motivating consciousness:

> It is thus not merely the experience of a common life, but rather the experience of its precariousness that lies at the root of religious reflection.[25]

It is the danger that fear, a necessary aspect of human existence, might become the dominating motivation of individuals and societies, which determines that religion is not only the celebration but also the bulwark of human fellowship: religion exists to counter the negative influence of fear in human agency and to transform fearfulness to love. More specifically, religion exists with a threefold purpose or function: it aims to maintain community; restore community where it has broken down; and extend the consciousness of community on a wider and wider basis.

Macmurray points to four aspects of religion which help to support the case that religion arises to sustain the personal dimension of life. Firstly, Macmurray argues that since religion is a universal phenomenon, then it must have a relation to some universal aspect of human life.[26] Secondly, since religion alone among the elements of human culture has no analogue in the world of animals, this suggests that it is related to a distinctive personal aspect of human existence. Thirdly, historically, religion has been the matrix out of which the other forms of reflection have grown, which may imply that religion cannot be distinguished in a radical way from the common experience which is the ground of the other forms of reflection.[27] Fourthly, religion is, by intention, inclusive of all within the society or group to which it refers.[28]

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[25] SRE, p.45.

[26] PR, p.156.

[27] SA, p.20.

[28] PR, p.156.

Taking these four marks of religion together, Macmurray suggests that the datum of religion must be the relation of persons which is the groundwork of human existence.[29] Moreover, in that religion is a reflective practice then it must be concerned with the problematic of the personal, for all reflection is undertaken for the resolution of some practical problem.

S2.2 The Function of Religion

According to Macmurray, within the family the functional interrelation of family members generally, though not inevitably, leads to the development of a unity of feeling. 'Unity of feeling' refers to the bonds of affection, of self-giving love, loyalty, and trust which grow up within families, and which bind members of a family together. In Macmurray's view, it is the unity of feeling which is the basis of a family's stability, and this is demonstrated by the fact that in times of stress a family may fragment, unless it is bound together by more than mere functional interdependence.

The function of religion is to extend the bonds of affection beyond their natural constituency, the family, to wider and wider groups of people.[30] Another way of putting this is to say that religion aims to lift the achievement of community to the level of an explicit intention; it is normally only a tacit intention in the context of the family. The function of religion can be subdivided into negative and positive aspects. The negative modality of religion takes the form of the attempt to preserve communities where they already exist, and to heal fractures in such communities. In its preservative role, religion aims to maintain the continuity of communal feeling over the generations, and, in particular, it seeks to maintain such continuity in spite of death.[31] One way in which religions have sought to achieve communal continuity is through the belief in life after death. Such a belief implies that each new generation is part of a wider community and tradition which stretches into the past and which will stretch into the future.

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[29] PR, p.157.

[30] SRE, pp.74-76.

[31] SRE, p.48.

Again, the conservative function of religion is expressed in the attempt to recreate the intention to live in community where this has been lost.[32] Macmurray points out that there are a number of circumstances where a community may share a common life, whilst not sharing a conscious intention to be in communion. That is, people may be reliant upon each other for the fulfilment of their needs and wants, without necessarily sharing affection and a conscious intention to act out of love for others. In this context, religion aims at encouraging individuals to treat with affection those others with whom they share a cooperative relationship. Macmurray notes that such a change cannot be imposed, but can only come about as individuals freely choose to act out of love rather than fear. Again, the restoration of community cannot be the act of one party, it must involve a mutual change of will, for the problem of the personal is a mutual problem. The only way in which those problems (sins) which lead to broken fellowship can be overcome, is through each alienated party being willing to act out of love to the other. Macmurray notes, perceptively, that personal alienation is typically paradoxical, for that which needs to be changed, the state of alienated consciousness, prevents the change which is needed. According to Macmurray, this paradox is reflected in religious paradoxes, such as the doctrine that people cannot save themselves, though their salvation must come about through their own free action.[33]

The positive, creative aspect of the religious function involves the 'realization of the possibilities of relationship'.[34] There are two dimensions to this positive function. Firstly, religion aims to establish a universal community. Macmurray holds that this tendency is integral to true religion.[35] The reason why there is an in-built tendency to universality in religion is that community is built on love. Since love, as a motive to action, cannot exist alongside fear, as a motive to action, there is an inherent tendency in religion, qua religion, to seek a universal community.

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[32] SRE, p.48.

[33] SRE, pp.49-50

[34] SRE, p.74.

[35] SRE, pp.74-76.

In seeking to extend the bonds of community there are two distinct problems which religion faces. The first is the task of establishing communal feeling upon the basis of the cooperative, functional relationships which already exist between people. In an age of globalisation most peoples of the world are functionally interdependent, and the religious function is to establish feelings of community upon this basis. Again, religion also aims to establish bonds of fellowship where no practical relationship already exists, and it is enabled to do this by the postulation of the belief that God intends a universal community.[36] A theological proposition takes the place of practical relationships.

Secondly, religion aims to realise the possibilities of community through the qualitative development of those communities which already exist. In this regard, religion aims to deepen and intensify the existing bonds of community, and it does this by encouraging an on-going spiral of reflection upon and experimentation in community:

> In this way the meaning and significance of personal relations are gradually disclosed to reflection. The ways in which the intention of love can be mutually realized and manifested are made operative in a wider range of activities[37]

Macmurray holds that his view of the function of religion is supported by a consideration of primitive tribal religion which, because it is quite distinct from Western religious experience, brings out very clearly the true nature of religion. Underlying this claim is the view that 'all primitive societies are religious'(are exemplars of true religion), which means that a consideration of any tribal religion will help the analyst to identify the function of religion.[38]

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[36] RAS, p.72.

[37] SRE, p.78.

[38] CH, p.27.

> In primitive society [writes Macmurray] it is clear that the function of religion is to create, sustain and express the emotional relationship which unites the members of the primitive group. The close connection of primitive religion with ancestor worship, the tendency for religious communities to trace their descent to a common ancestor, the religious ceremonies which extend the relation of brotherhood to people who are not natural brothers, often by the symbolic mingling of their blood, and a thousand other characteristics of primitive religion reveal very clearly that its function is to extend the sentiments which unite the members of the natural family beyond its natural limits.[39]

So, according to Macmurray, tribal religion shows that the function of religion is:

> To increase the scope and the complexity of human co-operation by creating, sustaining, and expressing men's union in a spiritual family or a spiritual brotherhood.[40]

In his analysis of tribal religion Macmurray suggests that the awareness which attends such religion has two dimensions. In the first place, in tribal religion each participant knows that he is part of the whole and intends that this be so, and this consciousness of communality is constitutive of the community.[41] Moreover, Macmurray claims that in its religious rituals the tribe celebrates its communality and reinforces it.

Secondly, there is in the consciousness of the tribe an awareness of the constant possibility that the intentional unity of the tribe might be broken. The fragility of the community's consciousness of itself as a community is related to the intentional nature of community. Since community is never a given, but always a present and future achievement, it follows that there is the ever present danger that the members of a community may not intend fellowship, and in this instance the community would collapse. Thus, the problem of the personal is an on-going aspect of human experience.

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[39] SRE, pp.42-43. Clearly this approach has echoes of that of Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Form of the Religious Life*, 2nd edn (London: Allen, 1976).

[40] SRE, p.43.

[41] PR, p.161.

In discussing the function of religion, Macmurray places stress on its role in countering fear, and this is because fear, when it becomes the dominant motive, tends to undermine community. This is the case because fear tends to make a person or a society defensive and egocentric, and this is the opposite of the attitude of self-giving love which sustains fellowship. Thus, if fellowship is to be preserved fear must be transformed into love, and this is the task of religion. This is not to say that religion aims at the eradication of fear, for fear is not, in itself, a pathological state, it is a necessary component of any action. Thus, in crossing a road there is nothing wrong with exercising due concern about the on-coming traffic. There would, however, be something pathological about a person who never crossed any road for fear of being knocked down by a car, and it is with the eradication of fear as a pathological condition that religion is concerned.

Macmurray maintains that religion meets the challenge of fear by promoting a consciousness of community. Since there is a connection between how the world is interpreted and how people act, religion, in promoting an exocentric way of apprehending the world, combats fear and promotes community.

For Macmurray, there are two specific pressure points which challenge the fragile unity of community. The first pressure point arises from the interaction of people together, and the possibility that, because of conflicts of interests, fear may come to be the dominant motive in such relationships. The second pressure point arises from the relationship which people have to their material environment. People may be overawed and afraid of nature, especially of death. Since, for Macmurray, fear is like a highly infectious disease which, once it has taken root, tends to spread throughout a person's motivating consciousness, it follows that fear of nature may undermine human fellowship.

S2.3 The Differentiation of Religious Reflection

If the task of religion is to promote a consciousness of being in community, then religion aims to fulfil its function through ritual practices, the development of contemplative practices and the construction of religious beliefs.

In Macmurray's view, the most important dimension of religion is its ritual :

> The primary expressions of reflective mutuality are symbolic actions, and where these involve speech it tends primarily to be symbolic, metaphorical, or mythical.[42]

Religion strengthens and initiates communal feeling by symbolising in its ritual activities the common life which a group or society shares. In this sense, the most vital aspect of religious reflection is the way in which religion draws human beings into interaction.[43] Moreover, according to Macmurray, the language which is associated with ritual is largely non-propositional. In discussing ritual, Macmurray argues that such activities can be thought of as the celebration of a community's consciousness of itself as a fellowship, and ritual celebration of this sort is conducive to the reinforcement of the mutual intention to community.[44]

In maintaining that the primary aspect of religious reflection is found in ritual, Macmurray is correlating ritual with his more general comments on action. Ritual is the primary form of religious reflection in so far as it involves the active interaction of persons. Because all action is conscious, it follows that ritual does involve thought, and in this context the thoughts involved in action will include specifically religious thoughts. Thus, religious rituals will assume the belief that God is present, active and receptive: in prayer, God is assumed to be receptive; preaching is done with the assumption that God actively communicates; the celebration of the sacraments points to the presence of God. In this sense,

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[42] SRE, p.79.

[43] RAS, pp.55-56.

[44] RAS, p.57.

Macmurray is not arguing that ideas are unimportant in ritual, only that they are important in ritual as an aspect of intention: they are part of the consciousness which attends action.

The secondary aspect of religious reflection is that which involves the worshipper stepping back from action and becoming a subject. There are two forms of this type of reflection, emotional and intellectual. The emotional or contemplative form of religious reflection corresponds to, and, indeed, is the root of the artistic mode of reflection. The contemplative mode of religious reflection aims at an articulation of religious values:

> Within religion the [sic] aesthetic reflection has the function of expressing a system of values as the structure of the way of life for a community; just as religion in its general function is concerned to transform the motives which determine the actions of men for creating and maintaining the way of life[45].

According to Macmurray, aesthetic reflection operates within religion by articulating a structure of values within the overarching value of fellowship. Moreover, because evaluative knowledge is to do with feeling, and feeling is that which initiates action, then aesthetic reflection is more important than intellectual reflection, for it is more immediately connected to action.

The intellectual form of religious reflection is that found in theological and philosophical discourse. Theological discourse corresponds, in Macmurray's view, to the scientific form of reflection, and, in this respect, theology aims at the identification of the means by which human fellowship can be attained. Theological ideas can be thought of ' as a means' in two regards. In the first place, religious ideas can help to sustain and intensify the intention to community. Thus, for instance, the religious belief that the universe is a sphere which is unified by the actions of a loving God, who works in history to bring about a universal community, is a belief which would encourage a positive motivation. That is, in so far as theology interprets the universe as a place in which there is no reason to fear, then it will encourage

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[45] RAS, pp.70-71.

exocentric patterns of motivation. Secondly, theology is a 'means' in that specific theological ideas can help to promote community. Particularly important here is the contribution of theological ideas to the overcoming of human alienation. In so far as theology aims to express the personal in universal terms, it follows that it involves an exploration of the universal dimensions of human alienation. Thus, according to Macmurray, notions such as the idea that salvation comes by grace alone are a symbolic representation of the universal truth that, in one part, reconciliation is something which must be received as a gift. In this manner, theological ideas can be helpful in illuminating the ways in which communion may be sustained and recovered.

It will be clear by now that Macmurray designates religious ideas (beliefs) a rather minor role in religious reflection. There are, I think, two reasons why Macmurray does this. Firstly, he wishes to stress that ideas are only ultimately important as they shape human intentions. Macmurray has two ways of thinking of 'belief'. On the one hand, a belief may be the affirmation of a set of propositions. On the other hand, 'belief' may refer to the propensity, inferred from the actions of a person, to act upon the basis of some affirmation or set of affirmations. When Macmurray suggests that belief is peripheral to religious reflection he is, I think, attempting to stress that it is belief in the second sense which is important to religion; that the mere holding of religious propositions is peripheral to the business of religion.

Secondly, Macmurray suggests that 'the intellectual moment in religious reflection is peripheral' in order to counter the corrosive effects of the tendency to identify religion with theological dogmas or moral rules:

> We take it for granted [writes Macmurray] [...] that a set of assertions in which a man says, 'I believe this and that and the other', are of the essence of his religion. We assume that if he cannot believe in certain traditional theological assertions he is ipso facto not a member of this or that religious communion. [...] The centrality of the intellectual moment is not [...] original in Christianity, but has been acquired in the process of history. This is well shown by the transformation of 'faith'. In the gospels the term hardly refers at all to beliefs; rather to an attitude of mind, primarily though nor exclusively directed towards persons, which is regularly contrasted with fear. A less misleading translation of the original term would now be 'trust'.[46]

S2.4 Some Basic Religious Beliefs

Although Macmurray holds that theological ideas are peripheral to religious reflection, yet he argues that certain beliefs are necessary, if tacit, features of religious reflection as a whole. In particular, Macmurray argues that, on the one hand, the belief in a personal God is basic to authentic religion and, on the other, that authentic religion affirms a 'personal universe'.

S2.4.1 The Belief in a Personal God

According to Macmurray, when religion has developed beyond its most primitive state, there is at least one idea which is 'inseparable from religious reflection', the idea of God.[47] The idea of God is a necessary part of religious reflection in that religion arises from and is concerned with the problem of the personal. In that religion aims to universalise the problem of the personal, its central concept must involve the expression of universal personality.[48] The concept of God is the means by which religion symbolises the universal aspects of human personality, and as such the concept of God is a necessary part of the religious attempt to overcome the problem of the personal.[49]

The concept of God plays three primary functions in religious reflection. In the first place, in so far as God is necessarily conceived as 'a universal person to whom the self stands in universal relation', then 'God' is essential to the universalisation of the mutuality which is characteristic of personal relations.[50]

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[46] RAS, pp.71-72.

[47] SRE, p.79.

[48] SRE, p.80.

[49] SRE, p.80.

[50] SRE, p.80.

That is, through thinking of God as a person who is similar to ourselves in most respects, it is possible to think of ourselves as being in a mutual relation to God. This means that theological reflection on the alienation of God and humankind is in fact an attempt to understand the character of that alienation which destroys human communities. 'God' is a symbolic way of trying to understand the character of human mutuality, and the obstacles that stand in the way of human fellowship. Moreover, if religion is indeed that mode of reflection which is concerned with the problem of the personal, then it is strictly speaking impossible to deny the existence of God. Since the idea of God is a necessary part of reflection on the problem of the personal, then acceptance of the view that the religious function is to do with the problem of the personal implies acceptance of 'God'. Moreover, in that religious reflection is the primary form of reflection, it follows that God, the primary concept of religious reflection, is the 'primary correlate of human rationality'.[51]

Secondly, the concept of God as an infinite person and creator enables religion to present an interpretation of the universe through which people can grasp themselves as part of the 'community of all existence'.[52] As God is thought of as the infinite and eternal person, then it is possible to think of him as being in relation to all humans past, present and future. Thus, the concept of God allows the believer to conceive the unity of the human community over the generations. Moreover, in that the believer is also in relation to God, then 'God' enables them to conceive of themselves as being united to the whole human community past, present and future. In this way, the concept of God is central to religious reflection, for such reflection aims to reinforce the consciousness that, " 'We belong together in a common life, and we are glad of it.' "[53]

Again, the concept of God as creator enables believers to think of themselves as being united to the whole of the created reality. In that the human community is dependent on the natural world, so if humans are to act without fear they must be able to think of themselves as being united to the world.

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[51] SRE, p.81.

[52] RAS, p.58.

[53] RAS, p.57.

This they are enabled to do through the concept of God as creator. The concept of God as creator suggests that all people are in relation to him who is the ground of all existence.

In that religion aims to extend community, this leads to another necessary element of the belief in God. In true religion God is understood as a worker God, and this is exemplified, for Macmurray, in Hebrew religion.[54] A worker God is one who is active in history with the intention of building a universal community. Part of what is involved in this belief is the correlate idea that human history can be regarded as the single action of God, in which God is realising his intention to build a universal community. Since God intends universal community, then history can be read as being determined by this intention, for 'since God is Absolute it is nonsensical to think that his intention in history will not be realized', and this means that a statement of God's intention is in fact a statement of what will happen in the future.[55]

According to Macmurray, the belief that history is the action of a worker God leads on to the view that human beings may be reconciled to God by the recognition of God's intention, and the adoption of that intention as their own.[56] When human beings perceive God's intention and make it their own they become co-workers with God, and history can then be read as both the realisation of God's intention and the realisation of human intention. This latter point is reinforced by the fact that the recognition of God's intention involves the perception that, since God is the creator, his intention reflects human nature and the realisation of human nature.[57] God's intention to forge a universal community reflects the fact that human beings are in essence personal beings: that which distinguishes human beings from animals is that human beings are fulfilled in acts of self-transcendence, human beings are realised in acts of selfless love to others. Thus, enfolded in a knowledge of God's intention is the 'self discovery of man', the

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[54] CH, p.109.

[55] CH, pp.94; 113; 58.

[56] CH, p.113.

[57] CH, pp.57; 95.

explicit awareness of that which was previously inchoate, that human beings have an in-built desire or impulse to fellowship, Macmurray comments:

> It is not so much the discovery of the good by thought. It is the discovery by the self of its own reality, and its own reality is that of a finite agent, created by God to co-operate with God in the creation of the Kingdom of God in the world.[58]

S2.4.2 The God who is experienced

Macmurray's functional view of 'God' raises the question of whether he thinks that the use of 'God' is related to an encounter in experience with a divine being? On the whole Macmurray does not hold that this is the case. Indeed, the logic of Macmurray's work is that in principle there cannot be a direct encounter with the divine, for if immediate experience is tied to agency and agency is to do with change in the material world, then it follows that there can only be immediate experience of the material. This is the basis of Macmurray's rather Kantian approach to the question of God, in which he argues that 'God' arises in human reflection as the necessary postulate for the recovery and sustenance of human community. However, it can be argued, as it will be later on, that Macmurray's epistemology is at this point somewhat of a procrustean bed which inhibits the full development of the logic of his work. Macmurray's work on religious reflection, it shall be argued, tends in many respects to support the view that religious belief arises in part from an immediate experience of the divine in ordinary experience. There are, indeed, tantalising hints in Macmurray's later work that he was aware of the need to understand religion as arising from a direct experience of God.[59]

In so far as Macmurray did hold that there is no direct experience of God, it follows that generally when he talks of the experience of God he is not referring to the direct apprehension of the divine, he writes:

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[58] CH, p.61.

[59] SRR, pp.34; 53.

> The belief that religion is grounded in mysticism, that it grows out of a commerce, real or imaginary, with the supernatural, is a form of confusion which is very common at the present time. Mysticism is, in itself [...] an aesthetic rather than a religious experience.[60]

Concomitantly, as has been shown, Macmurray's account of 'God' tends to the view that the concept arises as a means of enabling human communion. It is this that Trethowan is particularly critical of, he writes:

> It [Macmurray's work] rather suggests, when we consider its whole context, that God's function is simply to hold the world together, to make it a totality. Has he then no life of his own? Since he has been called the Creator of the world, it would seem that he must have. But, if we bear in mind what has been said of him on various occasions, we cannot help suspecting that he is, after all, only a function of the world, that he has no meaning in himself over and above the meaning which he gives to the world.[61]

Trethowan's criticism of Macmurray suggests the most appropriate way to understand Macmurray's talk of 'experiencing God'. Since, in Macmurray's view, 'God' is a functional concept, so it might be said that when the concept is being utilised properly then people are experiencing God: they are experiencing the meaning of the concept. Macmurray writes that 'the experience of God is the experience of total self-transcendence', which is to say that God is experienced when people relate to each other in self-denying love in response to the idea of God as the loving Father.[62]

Whilst Macmurray eschews the possibility of a direct experience of God, yet he argues that religious people view the world as the act of God. This means that Macmurray is committed to the idea that there is a non-material being, God, who is an infinite person (agent), and who is at work in the universe. Thus, Macmurray's position is that, on the one hand, there is a supernatural agent at work in the world but, on the other hand, that knowledge of this agent and his work arises only as a necessary postulate in the search for human community. It may well be that there is a tension between these two propositions, for it is difficult to see why, if God is at work in the world in the way in which Macmurray holds, it is

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[60] RAS, p.44.

[61] I. Trethowan, *Absolute Value* (London: Allen, 1970), pp.235-236.

[62] RAS, p.59.

not reasonable to argue that believers will in fact have a direct experience of God. It seems natural to argue that if religious belief involves experiencing the other in its entirety as personal, then religious belief involves the experience of God as he reveals himself in and through the other in its entirety.

S2.4.3 The Unity of the Universe

Another belief which Macmurray regards as basic to authentic religion is the affirmation that humans live in a 'personal universe'; this belief is the necessary ground of the suppression of fear. According to Macmurray, the belief that the universe is personal rests upon two other beliefs which can be argued for in a philosophical manner: that the environment can be interpreted as a unity; that the environment is a unity of action.

Macmurray holds that the unity of the universe can be inferred from agency. His argument is that any action contains within it an awareness of the agent's dependence on the universe - his unity with it - and an awareness of the unity of the universe upon which the agent depends. The unity of the universe can be inferred from action, in that action can only take place in a certain type of world. Action is only possible in a world which reveals a systematic pattern of development. That is, we can act because we experience the other as an integrated whole in which the present has developed out of the past. If the world were not of this systematic nature it would be impossible to have knowledge of it and thus action would be impossible. That is, action is purposeful movement, it involves choice on the basis of a knowledge of the past. Knowledge of the past is dependent, in Macmurray's view, on our experience of the world as an integrated whole, in which we can understand the relation of the present to the past. This is not to say that we can ever predict the future from the past with any precision, only that the present can be understood in its systemic relation to the past.[63] If there was not the possibility of such an understanding, then action would be impossible for action is the intention to determine the future which is shaped by a knowledge of the possibilities presented by the past. It is upon the basis of this understanding that Macmurray suggests that the ability to act must imply that the agent's primary

[63] SA, p.220.

experience of the other and himself is as a unity. We can only act where we can know, and knowledge requires that the other which supports the action and the self which initiates it are experienced in a unity.

A further condition of the 'personal universe' is that the unity of the human universe be conceived as a unity of action. Macmurray argues that there are only two ways of conceiving the unity of the universe, as process or action. Underlying this idea is the assumption which Macmurray makes, one which is tied up with his theory of action, that all occurrences can be divided into two classes, events or actions. Events are those occurrences which are brought about through a nexus of cause and effect; actions are those occurrences brought about through human intention. But whilst, prima facie, all occurrences can be divided into two classes, the unity of the universe implies that ultimately the human universe is either a unity of action or a unity constituted by a mechanistic nexus of cause and effect.[64] To describe this latter unity Macmurray uses the term 'process', but in the light of Process Philosophy Macmurray's use of 'process' may mislead, and so 'process' will be avoided in the following discussion of Macmurray's ideas.

In Macmurray's view, the primary certainty of all human reflection is that humans act. But the idea of the universe as a mechanistic unity would contradict the primary certainty that humans act and that humans know. This means that it is illegitimate to think of the unity of the universe in mechanistic terms.

The attempt to view the world as a mechanistic unity is invalid, because such a view would exclude action. A mechanistic conception of the world tends to hold that all variations in the world are brought about through 'energy expressing itself in the displacement of mass', and, as such, the changes which take place in this world are always determined.[65] This view of the world is inconsistent with the fact that humans are acting beings, for in the mechanistic view of the world nothing is ever done, everything

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[64] SA, p.219.

[65] PR, p.219.

simply happens. Moreover, a mechanistic view is inconsistent with the fact of human knowledge, for if human beings do not act they do not know either, for Macmurray claims that human knowledge of the other arises in action.[66] Thus, in order to avoid conclusions which are at odds with human agency and knowledge, the world must be construed in a way 'such that it can produce such creatures as we are, and it must contain in itself the possibility of a problematical activity like our own'.[67]

The putative refutation of the mechanistic view of the world, leads Macmurray to suggest that the world must be thought of as a unity of action. That is, Macmurray argues that the unity of the world must be thought of in terms of the unity or continuity imposed upon the world by agency. The unity of the world is the continuity which arises from the fusion of human intentions into a unity of intention.[68] It might be thought that it is impossible to think of all events as gathered together as a unity of action. What of occurrences that are self-evidently not the result of human actions, such as an earthquake? Macmurray's response to this is two-fold. In talking of historiography, he points out that the historian studies the non-personal only as it effects the actions of the agent. The event is important as it is a factor in the consciousness of human agents and shapes their actions for better or for worse. Thus, events are gathered up for the historian into the unity of action that characterises human history. Of course, it is impossible to prove that all events are brought about by human intention, and many are clearly not so, but this does not mean that they cannot be referred to human actions in the sense that they enter human experience as an aspect of action.[69]

Macmurray appears to go further in his designation of the personal character of all experience, when he suggests that even events which are patently non-intentional from the human point of view, may ultimately be referable to the 'intention of an agent.'[70] His point is that this cannot be conclusively disproved and so it is logically '*possible* to think the world as one action', whilst, 'it is *not possible* to

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[66] SA, p.218.

[67] SA, p.219.

[68] SA, p.213.

[69] SA, p.220.

[70] SA, p.220.

think it as a unitary process'.[71] Moreover, the adequacy of thinking of the world as a unity of action is borne out by the observation that much of what is regarded as impersonal is in fact abstracted from action. Further, Macmurray holds that those impersonal aspects of human experience which are clearly not derived from human agency, such as events in the natural world, may nevertheless be thought of as being brought about through the intention of an agent. In the latter case the agent must be God.

S2.4.4 The Personal Universe

Thus far we have seen that Macmurray wishes to argue that any religious metaphysics must construe the world as a unity of action or intention, for this is the necessary ground of human action. But this is still not sufficient to promote action motivated by love. For this, it is necessary to construe the unity of the world as lying in the loving intention of the supreme agent, who is the creator and sustainer of the whole universe.[72]

For Macmurray, the problem of whether one construes the universe as personal or impersonal is the ultimate question lying between religion and atheism. The problem of God's existence is not the problem of whether an item called God exists in the same sense as a light bulb may exist.[73] Rather, the question of God's existence is the question of the nature of the other which is known in action. The ultimate nature of the other, and the relation of humans to it is not disclosed in immediate experience, it must be determined in ideas. The adequacy of a metaphysics is, in turn, to be judged by whether it enables freedom in agency.

Macmurray argues that religious ideas are to be verified according to whether they promote positively motivated action or community. The idea of a loving God who unites the world by his action is, according to Macmurray, one which does promote community, and it does so because it emphasises the sense in which we can be personally related (lovingly related) to the universe as a whole. Thus, the

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[71] SA, p.220.

[72] PR, p.114.

[73] PR, p.214.

concept of the personal universe contributes to the suppression of fear as a dominant motive, and so promotes human community.

S3 Assessment and Conclusion

Macmurray holds that religious belief is the attempt to resolve a fundamental problem which arises in ordinary experience. There are, it will be maintained, good grounds for thinking that Macmurray is illuminating on this point. Moreover, the case for Macmurray's analysis is strengthened to the extent that that his work casts important light on the nature of religious language, the function of religious belief, the task of the Christian apologist, and the verification of religious belief. In so far as Macmurray's analysis provides the basis for an insightful view of various dimensions of the religious, to that extent its plausibility is strengthened. Yet, whilst Macmurray provides a useful framework within which to understand the relation between religious belief and ordinary experience, his analysis is suspect in two areas. Firstly, his suggestion that the 'problem of the personal' underlies religious belief is open to criticism; a strong argument can be made that Christian belief may be thought of as arising in response to the intuition of the divine presence in ordinary experience. Secondly, perhaps Macmurray overstates the degree to which religious belief is shaped by ordinary experience, and he underestimates the degree to which religious practice is shaped by religious belief.

S3.1 A Critical Excursus

Before turning to the discussion of Macmurray's philosophy of religion directly, it is valid to make some comment on the style of Macmurray's argumentation. Macmurray's work is marked by some penetrating insights, but it is also frequently characterised by a certain carelessness in the arguments put forward, which is only partially mitigated by the wide range of the concerns with which Macmurray is dealing, and his background in a non-analytical philosophical tradition.[74] Macmurray's carelessness is

[74] Dorothy Emmet, 'Review of The Self as Agent', *JTS*, 9, 410-412; see also Dorothy M. Emmet, *Philosophers and Friends* (London: Macmillan, 1996), pp.51-55.

seen in his discussion of religion. There is, in the first place, his failure to firmly establish his central thesis: that religion is primarily concerned with the 'problem of the personal'. Since this thesis conflicts with what religious people, and certainly Christians, tend to think that religion is about, it follows that a very strong argument would be needed to sustain it and no such argument is forthcoming. Macmurray's primary argument in support of his thesis is that religion since it is unique to human beings must be concerned with that which is uniquely human, and that since it is the capacity for fellowship which differentiates human beings from other creatures, therefore religion is about the sustaining and recovery of human fellowship. This argument is somewhat questionable at a number of points, but perhaps it is most vulnerable in its contention that it is the capacity for fellowship which differentiates human beings. Whilst the capacity for fellowship is an important aspect of human life, it is arguable that there are other defining characteristics such as the capacity for communication with the divine. This being the case, it follows that Macmurray needs to work far harder to substantiate the central thesis of his philosophy of religion.

Again, Macmurray sometimes tends to over-simplification of issues. For instance, in his discussion of the personal character of the universe, his case is built upon the claim that there are only two possible ways of construing the unity of the universe: it is either a personal universe or one shaped by a deterministic nexus of cause and effect. Intuitively, one feels that this way of presenting the issue needs to be nuanced, and that the real challenge in imaging the unity of the universe lies in probing the relation between the impersonal and the personal without reducing one or the other. In his discussion of the unity of the universe Macmurray arrives at rather implausible conclusions, such as that we must ultimately conceive of all events in terms of God's agency. The implausibility of some of Macmurray's conclusions reinforce the case for a more subtle approach to the matter.

S3.2 Religious Belief as A Posteriori

There are two arguments, arising in Macmurray's work, which may be deployed to sustain the view that religious belief is a response to a problem discovered in agency. Firstly, Macmurray's epistemology

implies this view of religious belief. Secondly, he develops an argument that the universality of religion implies that it is a response to some universal problem.

Chapter 2 included an extended discussion of Macmurray's epistemology. It was said there that Macmurray is correct when he points to the analytical distinction between reflective and immediate experience. It was also maintained that Macmurray's argument that reflection is derivative from immediate experience is illuminating: it is helpful to think of reflection as arising in order to fructify the agent's knowledge of the environment so as to enhance interaction with that environment. The implication of this point of view is that religious reflection arises out of immediate experience in order to respond to some problem and so facilitate action. Macmurray's general theory of knowledge leads to his distinctive view of the relation of religion and ordinary experience.

A second argument that can be taken from Macmurray's work, is that which focuses upon the universality of religion, Macmurray writes:

> No human society from the most primitive to the most completely civilized, has ever existed without a religion of some kind. This can only signify that the source of religion must lie in some characteristic of human experience which is common and universal.[75]
>
> Religion is the original, and the one universal expression of our human capacity to reflect; as primitive and as general as speech. [...] So far, too, from being heterogeneous with other aspects of culture, and resting upon abnormal experience which contrasts with our common aware-ness [sic] of the world, religion is the source from which the various aspects of human culture have been derived.[76]

In these passages Macmurray makes a strong case for holding that religion arises in response to certain universal human problems. The first point which he makes is that religion is a universal phenomenon; historically, all societies and most individuals have engaged in religious practices. This is a statement with which one can agree, but in doing so it is right to draw attention to an important omission in

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[75] PR, p.156.

[76] SA, p.20.

Macmurray's work. Though he discusses the characteristics and underlying purpose of religion, his work exhibits no satisfactory attempt to actually define 'religion'. This means that when he says that religion is universal we are left wondering what exactly it is that is found in every society, and whether all religious phenomena are essentially the same. The fact that we do use the terms 'religion' and 'religious' without too much difficulty suggests that a satisfactory definition might be possible, but Macmurray doesn't offer such a definition. If we are to make sense of the claim that there is a universal experience underlying religion, then a suitable definition of 'religion' is a prerequisite.

Secondly, Macmurray argues that the universality of religion suggests that it has it roots in common experience. This is to say, the universal occurrence of religious practice suggests that religion is a response to certain enduring and problematic aspects of human experience; it is not, fundamentally, a response to that which is abnormal or esoteric. It may be suggested that this argument has a probabilistic potency. We may suppose that the widespread occurrence of religious practice suggests that this mode of reflection arises in response to certain basic and problematic experiences which are common to all.

The argument from universality provides solid underpinning for Macmurray's analysis of the relation of religion and ordinary experience, for the universality argument may be used to help sustain the claim that religion is not only a universal historical response to certain questions, but that religion is the appropriate response to certain basic questions of human life. Isaiah Berlin argues that the recurrence in human history of certain ways of interpreting human life - such as the attempt to think of human society as being like an organism - reflects the fact that these modes of thinking have permanent interpretative value in so far as they are an appropriate description of or response to some enduring feature(s) of human experience.[77] Likewise, from the fact of the universality of religion it can be inferred that religious models and categories are enduring because they are the appropriate way by which certain facets of experience can be addressed and responded to.

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[77] Isaiah Berlin, 'The Purpose of Philosophy', in *Concepts and Categories*, ed. by Henry Hardy (Oxford: OUP, 1980), pp.1-11 (p.9-10).

S3.3 The Character of Religious Language

Given that religious belief is a response to certain dimensions of ordinary experience, it is reasonable to suppose that the language used in religious discourse and practice is a specialised use of concepts which find their original use in everyday life. One example of such a transposition is found in the religious use of 'personality'. According to Macmurray, 'personality' points to the differentia of human beings as both immanent and transcendent of experience. The act of passing judgement on oneself illustrates the nature of human transcendence and immanence. As passing judgement the human being is transcendent of experience, able to stand over against himself and utter judgement on his actions. Again, as judged the human being is immanent in experience. In Macmurray's estimation, the ideas of immanence and transcendence arise from the fact of human personality; they are then transposed to religious discourse as ways of describing God.[78] Likewise, the concepts of fellowship, community, enmity, estrangement, guilt, and forgiveness arise from the 'universal human experience of the life of personal relationship' and are then transposed to religious discourse.[79]

Macmurray's view of religious language appears plausible, and has significant implications. The fact that many religious concepts arise out of the human encounter with the material world, suggests that the meaningfulness of these concepts, when used in religious contexts, is dependent on the preservation of transparent connections between religious usage and the original usage. Thus, 'personal' may be meaningfully applied to God in an adapted form so long as something remains of its original usage. Theology involves the identification of those elements of ordinary usage which might be adapted to enable speech about God.

S3.4 Religious Belief and Religious Faith

As we have seen, Macmurray views the aim of religion as the transformation of human experience. Religious ideas are important in so far as they inform and shape the actions of the religious person and community. Macmurray's view of the role of religious beliefs is insightful and consistent with the

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[78] SRE, p.27.

[79] SRE, p.37.

Christian tradition. For Macmurray, religious beliefs have a very direct relation to ordinary experience, for they are concerned with the on-going exploration and transformation of experience in creative ways. Macmurray's view has implications for our understanding of the theological task. In the first place, Macmurray's view suggests that the primary task of the apologist is to show how holding the religious ideas found within his tradition and acting upon the basis of these ideas can engender human freedom and fulfilment. Macmurray's masterly analysis of human community and the function of 'God' in engendering and maintaining community is itself an example of the kind of apologetics implied by his work.

Secondly, if religious ideas aim at the transformation of human experience in a positive direction, then it follows that an important criterion by which a religious idea can be judged is that of whether it tends to promote certain desired patterns of action or not. One objection to this suggestion is that a religious idea may, in practice, be associated with a number of ways of acting, which suggests that the practical verification of an idea is well-nigh impossible. However, this objection is not conclusive. It is, of course, true that people holding a similar religious viewpoint may act very differently. In part, these practical differences may be explained by the varying networks of beliefs and mores within which specifically religious ideas find a place. Again, it may be that the practical implications of a religious viewpoint are obscure, and so different people will draw different practical implications from the same belief or set of beliefs. Or, there may be reasons why believers choose to ignore the practical implications of their beliefs. But the mere fact that those holding similar beliefs act differently, does not invalidate the attempt to verify religious beliefs according to the actions which they promote. For the practical verification of a belief hinges, not on the way in which believers act, but on the logical analysis of the practical implications of the belief if it is held and acted upon consistently. In ascertaining whether a belief promotes life enhancing forms of action, it is relevant to observe the way in which those who hold that belief act, but such empirical study is not, in the end, decisive.

S3.5 The Ground of Religion in Ordinary Experience

Macmurray is, I believe, right to argue that whilst religions such as Christianity are interested in the whole of ordinary experience and most certainly they are interested in experiences such as birth, death, moral failure, and nature's evocation of awe in the human heart, yet they are distinguished as religions by the way in which they treat of these 'facts' of experience.[80] More particularly, what characterises a religion is that the dimensions of ordinary experience are understood and responded to in terms of a distinctive interest in some particular aspect of common experience. The aspect of experience which is the focus of concern of a religion, and the interpretation which is placed on this, becomes the centre around which religious people organise their experience of and response to their environment as a whole. This being said, the key question is, in Macmurray's words:

> What are the facts and aspects of common human experience to which we turn, and in which our interest centres, when we approach the world in a religious frame of mind?[81]

Macmurray answers this question quite unequivocally. For him, religion qua religion is concerned with the 'problem of the personal', and this is the organising centre of the religious outlook on common experience as a whole. It is in these terms that Macmurray argues that the concern of religion with death, the relation to nature and moral failure must be understood in terms of the overall concern of religion with resolving the problem of the personal. Macmurray's argument here is open to the criticism that it is improbable that Christianity takes its rise from the problem of the personal. Indeed, Macmurray's own work implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, suggests that religion primarily arises from the experience of the divine as it reveals itself in human experience.

S3.5.1 The Organising Centre of Christianity

Macmurray holds that the various concerns of 'authentic' religion are linked by the common aim of defeating fear and promoting loving actions. This argument is somewhat weak, for a theistic view of

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[80] SRR, p.23.

[81] SRR, p.23.

death, moral failure and the other subjects with which Christianity is typically concerned, does not appear to be a necessary condition of acting lovingly. Everyday experience suggests that it is quite possible to be ambivalent in the face of many of life's challenges, and yet committed to acting exocentrically. A theistic perspective may, of course, strengthen an exocentric orientation, but there is not reason to believe that it is necessary to such an orientation. If no strong causal connection exists between holding theistic views on death, nature and moral failure and acting lovingly, it may be argued that the principal interest of Christianity lies elsewhere than the problem of the personal. If Macmurray is right, then religions and Christianity above all exist as the best way of countering fear and religious beliefs are a means to this end. But, if religious beliefs appear to be relatively peripheral in some respects to the promotion of a loving motivation, it may be better to seek another way of understanding the primary interest of a religious tradition.

It seems relatively unproblematic to agree with Macmurray that the primary belief of Christianity is the affirmation of a God who may be alluded to using the language of the personal. This being the case it appears reasonable to assume that the primary interest of Christianity is in an aspect of common experience which gives rise directly to such a belief. Macmurray tries to show that the idea of God arises from the search for community, but he nowhere explains why the search for community generates the imaginative leap which would be needed to formulate the idea of 'God' as he describes it. This omission is a serious one, and it suggests that Macmurray's achievement is not to show how the concept of God arose, but to show the utility of a Christian 'God' in attempting to resolve the problem of human alienation. Macmurray shows that the idea of God as a loving father provides an impetus to the search for human community, but does not show that such a search can justify the construction of an idea of God.

S3.5.2 The Logic of Macmurray's Work Leads Beyond 'The Problem of the Personal'

It can be argued that in his discussion of religious experience Macmurray presses implicitly beyond his own major assertion: that religion arises from the problem of the personal. In particular, Macmurray edges towards the recognition that religious belief must be understood, at least in part, as a response to

the recognition of a divine presence in human experience. Macmurray holds that a religious perspective regards the whole of experience as a unity, it is united in being the one act of a personal loving deity. The goal of religious reflection is the practical appropriation of the whole range of human experience as personal. But, if the other in its entirety is experienced as personal, it seems most convincing to argue that this is because there is a divine presence revealing itself across the whole range of human experience. This is a simpler and more convincing explanation than Macmurray's. Moreover, Macmurray himself seems on a few occasions to concede that religious belief arises not only from the problem of the personal, but from the incursion of the divine into human experience, he writes:

> My conjecture is that it [the structure of religion] is governed by the sense of an unseen presence, of something more in our experience which is somehow personal, which transcends our familiar experience of life in common, and yet which faces us when we reflect deeply upon our everyday activities. In our own terms it is the experience of the presence of God.[82]

Again he writes:

> All religion, I believe, rests on the experience of the presence of God. This experience manifests itself in feelings of awe and self-abasement, but it does not reveal the nature of God, only His majesty and power. This is why there is such a variety in the conception of God in different religions. For the Christian, in his worship of God, there is, however, another experience, that of the presence of Jesus Christ in and amongst the worshippers. And this presence seems, as it were, to coalesce with, or join itself to the presence of God, in such a fashion as to provide the image of God that we need.[83]

And in commenting on the demythologising project Macmurray cautions theologians about going too far in this direction for all religious language about God, 'must contain a mythological element, since it must speak, in terms of our ordinary experience, of what lies beyond it [...] God is beyond the personal, of course; but it is the personal in our experience which points in the direction of God'.[84]

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[82] SRR, p.34.

[83] SRR, p.53.

[84] SRR, p.45, note.

The quotations above are significant, yet as Trethowan notes, the ideas which Macmurray expresses here stand in tension with the assertion which is found throughout the great body of his work: that religion arises from the problem of the personal and not from an experience of the divine.[85] In his Terry Lectures Macmurray comments, 'The field of religion is the field of personal experience. The centre of this field is the experience we have of other persons in relation to ourselves. In all our relations with one another we are in the field of religion.'[86] The idea being put here is that religion arises in response to some wholly mundane aspect of ordinary experience. Underlying this position is Macmurray's assertion that religion does not arise from special forms of intuition which disclose a suprasensory reality. Indeed, Macmurray claims that putative intuitions of this sort are nothing more than the voice of the subconscious shaped by tradition.[87] This position, which is repeated throughout the great body of his work, stands in tension with Macmurray's concession, late in his career, that religion arises in part from the intuition of the presence of the divine.

S3.5.3 The Sense of the Presence of God Enables the Overcoming of Certain Difficulties in Macmurray's Work

The argument that it is helpful to think of religious belief as a response to the awareness of the divine, is strengthened in so far as this perspective enables the resolution of some of the problems detectable in Macmurray's account, which arguably arise from his attempt to root religion in the problem of the personal. One difficulty in Macmurray's analysis is to do with his discussion of religion as the search for a unified view of the world. Macmurray, rightly, argues that religion is the attempt to obtain a unified view of experience as the basis for action. He also argues that the metaphysical quest of religion arises from the memory of occasions when the agent's experience of the other and of himself is marked by unity: the childhood experience of a relation in which there is a harmony of intention and outcome and the experience of the agent when agency is unproblematic. However, it is difficult to believe that the fleeting experience of finding agency unproblematic could suggest to the agent that it might be feasible to view the whole of human experience as a unity. It would be like saying that that the search for

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[85] Trethowan, p.237.

[86] SRE, p.45.

[87] John Macmurray, 'Beyond Knowledge' in *Adventure: The Faith of Science and the Science of Faith*, ed. by B. Streeter (London: Macmillan, 1927), pp.21-45.

theodicies has arisen from the common experience of accidentally stubbing one's toe. Just as it is unlikely that the problem of evil would have arisen from such a narrow ground in experience, so it is unlikely that the metaphysical search would have arisen from the rather narrow experiences which Macmurray discusses.

The problems with Macmurray's account of the metaphysical search can be resolved once it is allowed that religion is, in part, a response to the intuition of the divine across the range of human experience. The intuition that there is a non-material reality disclosing itself through the material world as a whole might plausibly lead to the search for a way of understanding the material as a unity in terms of its dependence upon the divine. Moreover, once it is allowed that the metaphysical impulse arises from the intuition that the divine has a relation to the whole material world, then it is possible to appreciate the real value of Macmurray's discussion. Macmurray's discussion does not illuminate the origin of the metaphysical impulse, but his analysis of agency and relationships may provide a clue to the character of the unified perspective which is sought. It may be that the experiences which Macmurray discusses are microcosms of experience as a whole. Macmurray's analysis suggests that the religious quest is for a unified perspective on the world which will underpin human freedom.

Again, the inadequacy of Macmurray's starting point in the 'problem of the personal' is reflected in the difficulties which beset his idea of 'revelation'. Macmurray argues that revelation is the progressive disclosure of God's purposes through the attempt to interpret the meaning of history 'religious reflection becomes a continuous interpretation of history, and historic experience becomes a progressive revelation of the nature and purpose of God'.[88] Macmurray argues further that Jesus' significance is that he represents the 'complete unfolding' of the 'Hebrew religious consciousness'.[89] That is, Jesus gave the veridical interpretation of human history, and he did this by his proper understanding of the 'principles

[88] CH, p.40.

[89] CH, pp.54-55.

which actually determine social success or failure', or, to put the matter religiously, Jesus understood the purpose of God in history:[90]

> Jesus became conscious of the intention of God in human history. Thus Jesus marks the point in history at which it becomes possible for man to adopt consciously as his own purpose the purpose which is already inherent in his own nature.[91]

Macmurray claims with some justification that his understanding of revelation is consistent with that of the major Old Testament prophets. In this sense Macmurray's understanding of 'revelation' must find some place in an understanding of the concept. But, Macmurray's understanding of 'revelation' begs the question of why human beings have been prone to interpret historical experience as revealing the will of God. One plausible explanation is that the theistic interpretation of history is logically subsequent to the experience of the divine in history. Thus, revelation in the sense in which Macmurray understands it presupposes revelation in a different sense: the immediate disclosure of the divine presence in human experience. The recognition of the sense of the divine does not undermine, but complements and grounds Macmurray's useful discussion of revelation.

S3.6 The Relation of Religious Belief, Religious Practice and Ordinary Experience

According to Macmurray, religious belief is quite peripheral to religious life because it is a means to the achievement of ends, it is not constitutive of religious activity. Religious belief aims to help articulate and so realise the aspiration to universal fellowship which arises 'naturally' in the course of human experience. That is, Macmurray does not only argue that religious belief arises out of the problem of the personal, he also maintains that the content of religious belief and religious practice is set by the problem of the personal, and the intuitions and inclinations rooted in common experiences such as the relation between mother and child, regarding the solution to the problem of the personal.

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[90] CH, p.39.

[91] CH, p.55.

It may be argued that there are problems in Macmurray's suggestion that religious belief can be thought of as, primarily, the attempt to articulate intuitions and inclinations which are integral to ordinary experience, for whilst religious belief will be, in part at least, an attempt to articulate these intuitions, yet it is also an attempt to explore the experiences from which it arises and, to develop new ways of interpreting and relating to these experiences. One example of the creative way in which religious belief relates to ordinary experience, is seen in the relation between Christian fellowship and the examples of loving intimacy found in ordinary experience. As has already been argued, agape represents a considerable development when placed alongside the love of mother to child, or other such examples of love as found in everyday life. In this way, religious belief is seen to relate proactively to ordinary experience, and this view of the matter is consistent with the inner logic of Macmurray's own work and with the New Testament.

S3.6.1 Macmurray's Own Work Leans to a Formative Role for Belief

Though Macmurray seems to go out of his way to emphasise the peripheral role of religious belief, yet in practice he tends to allow a far more important role to belief and reflective thought. In his Gifford Lectures, Macmurray sets himself the task of defining and illustrating the usefulness of a new logical form, the form of the personal. Macmurray hopes to replace dualistic ways of thinking of human existence - what he means by 'dualistic' need not detain us here - with a more holistic view of human existence. The point is, Macmurray clearly sees his work as contributing to the resolution of practical problems, and in this regard he must hold that how human beings think about themselves (which logical form shapes their thought) has an important influence on how they act. Indeed, the view that human thought decisively shapes human action is inherent in Macmurray's emphasis on action as purposive and shaped by knowledge. Thus, the aspiration which lies behind Macmurray's project stands in some tension with his assertion that belief is peripheral to action. This tension is exhibited in Macmurray's assertion that, on the one hand, religious beliefs are peripheral to religious practice, whilst, on the other hand, a rather sophisticated concept of God is presented as being absolutely central to religious practice. In reading Macmurray's work on religion, the most natural way to interpret him is to suggest the function of the concept of a personal God is not merely to sustain and give effect to a prior nascent

commitment to universal fellowship; 'God' is constitutive of the commitment to universal fellowship. It is the concept of God, as Macmurray describes it, and the connective system of concepts in which it resides which gives rise to the valuation of universal community as an absolute value.

S3.6.2 The New Testament Supports the View that Belief is Constitutive of Religious Practice

The view that religious practice arises out of religious belief is consistent with the Christian tradition as found in the New Testament. This view is certainly present in the gospels. In his first reported sermon Jesus declares that the 'kingdom of God is near', and urges his congregation to 'repent and believe the good news'(Mark 1.15); this suggests the basic pattern of the Christian message. Jesus, firstly highlights the indicatives of grace: God's kingdom is near, God's rule is breaking into human history in a new way. Secondly, the imperatives follow the indicatives of grace; Jesus calls his listeners to respond to the act of God by believing his message, and in beginning to live in conformity to God's will. Moreover, in as much as the beatitudes may be taken as a snapshot of the virtues to be found in a citizen of God's kingdom, then it is clear that citizenship of the kingdom requires a very substantial reorientation of motive and purpose. But, and this is of crucial importance, repentance does not precede but follows God's action: it is a response shaped by assent to the kergymatic declaration of God's gracious in-breaking. Thus, belief logically precedes practice (religious and ethical renewal) though the two are closely related.

If it is true that the gospels emphasise the logical primacy of belief over practice, it is true that the Apostle Paul also places belief at the forefront of his articulation of the Christian faith. As is well known, Paul places more emphasis on the value of correct belief than do the gospels. But Paul himself also stresses that the goal of orthodoxy is conformity to the will of God, and this is reflected in the typical pattern of Paul's writings as they move from the discussion of doctrine to the explanation of the practical implications of the doctrines discussed. Thus, in 'Romans', which is the most purely doctrinal of his writings, Paul gives an outline of the body of Christian belief in chapters 1-11, whilst in chapters 12-16 he points to the profound impact which Christian belief ought to have on the everyday life of the

Christian believer; in these latter chapters Paul encourages his readers to be humble, loving and ready to serve.

S3.6.3 The Relation Between Belief and Practice

Whilst Macmurray's view that religious belief is relatively inert may be questioned, it is important to appreciate why he affirms this view. He does so in order to give an unequivocal reposte to the view that to be religious, or more particularly Christian, all that is required is mere assent to certain religious propositions. It can, however, be argued that a more effective riposte to the tendency of which Macmurray is, rightly, critical, is the development of a view of the relation between belief and practice, which allows for the constitutive role of belief, but which understands the relation between belief and practice as an intrinsic one. One helpful way of achieving such a view is by thinking of the relation between belief and practice in terms of the distinction between 'belief that' and 'belief in'.

S3.6.3.1 Belief That

'Belief that' is, in Russell's terms, a ' propositional attitude'.[92] When a person asserts that they believe P, then they are asserting that they believe that a proposition P is true. This is to say, if one holds to the view that a belief is a disposition to act in a certain way, then to 'believe that' P is to be disposed, given the appropriate conditions, to entertain the proposition that P is true. Where a person 'believes that' P it is inconceivable that they might not hold that P is true, for it is impossible to believe what one knows to be false, although this is not to say that many things that one believes may not, in fact, be false. Moreover, though to 'believe that' P is primarily a propositional attitude, yet such a belief will also involve a disposition to act in terms of the belief. That 'belief that' always involves some disposition to practical action is confirmed by the counterfactual example.[93] If a person said that they believed that P was true, but P was never amongst the stock of premises upon which they based their practical reasoning, then one would be inclined to hold that that person did not really believe that P was true.

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[92] H.H. Price, *Belief* (London: Allen, 1969), p.79.

[93] Price, p.259.

'Belief that' is a usage which places the emphasis on holding certain propositions as true, and in this sense 'belief that' is a constituent aspect of all belief, for it is inconceivable that a person might be said to believe P if there were no circumstances in which they would be disposed to entertain the proposition that P is true. It may be, of course, that a belief might be held tacitly or it might be suppressed by a psychological mechanism, so that it would be hard for a person to recognise and own their belief. But, in principle, where there is a belief then it must be that, under certain circumstances, the person involved would entertain the belief as true. It is however perfectly possible that a person might be little disposed to act in terms of P, but this would not necessarily undermine their claim to believe P. There may, for instance, be difficulties in identifying the practical applications of a belief, or it may be that the practical implications of a belief are overridden by another belief which is held with greater intensity; these instances show that it is possible to believe P without realising the disposition inherent in this belief to act in terms of P.

S3.6.3.2 'Belief in'

The use of 'belief in' shows a number of variations. In some contexts when a person says that they believe in P, 'believe in' is synonymous with 'belief that'. Thus, when a person says that they believe in the planet Jupiter, it is most likely that they are simply saying that they belief that the planet Jupiter exists. A more interesting use of 'believe in' is when it is a form of self-involving language: when it conveys an evaluation, an expectation or a commitment. Thus, when a person says that they 'believe in' a certain hammer, they are not making the utterly trivial observation that the hammer, they are expressing an evaluation of the tool. Their evaluation of the hammer is based in their awareness of the reliability of the tool in the past, which gives rise to the expectation that it will be similarly reliable in the future.[94] Thus, 'belief in' conveys approbation. 'Belief in' also involves the commitment of the believer in a certain way, for if one believes in the hammer one is committing oneself ceteris paribus to make use of the tool in the appropriate circumstances.

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[94] Price, p.450.

The analysis above suggests that 'belief in' involves both cognitive and evaluative elements. 'Belief in' a hammer involves the belief that the hammer has and will be reliable, but it also involves the feeling that the hammer is a good tool and may be trusted and even esteemed.

Perhaps the most interesting application of 'belief in' is when a someone says that they 'believe in' another person. At the lower limit this usage may be quite similar to the assertion of 'belief in' a tool. A person may be valued as a means to an end as, for instance, when someone is valued as a good worker. A step beyond this usage is when 'belief in' points to an general attitude of trust directed towards another person. Thus, a manager may say that she 'believes in' her deputy, by which is meant the manager trusts the judgement and competency of her subordinates over a whole range of issues. In this case, 'belief in' encompasses the general character of the person to which it is directed, and not just one limited sphere of competency. This type of generalised trust may lead on to friendship. At the upper limit 'believe in' suggests the general esteem and trust that a person bears to a friend. In this case 'belief in' conveys an attitude of intrinsic valuation, the ideas of effectiveness and efficiency are no longer relevant, a friend is valued as a person.

The analysis of 'belief in' suggests that it is a self-involving locution: this usage involves a cluster of attitudes and emotions. Since, feeling is that which moves one to action it follows that there is an intrinsic relation between 'believing in' and acting in terms of that belief. If one 'believes in' a tool, one will be disposed, ceteris paribus, to make use of the tool under appropriate circumstances. Again, if one believes in a person as a friend, then one will be disposed to act lovingly towards that friend. If religious belief is a type of 'belief in', it may be thought that it is similar to 'belief in' a friend. Thus, in the credal confession of 'belief in' God, the believer both entertains the proposition that God exists and commits himself to worshipping, trusting and serving him. Moreover, in professing 'belief in' God the worshipper implicitly recognises God as the one is which he lives and moves and has his being. This means that since God is the source of all things and the source of value, loving and serving God must be that which is of highest value. Another way of putting this, is to say that from a religious perspective the worship and service of God are matters of supreme value. This being the case, it follows that to

profess 'belief in' God is to make a commitment to the worship and service of God which admits of no circumstances where other values or concerns may legitimately take precedence. Thus, in religious belief there is not only a necessary relationship between belief and religious practice, there is also no circumstance in which the disposition to live as a Christian may legitimately be set aside. In so far as Christians sometimes do not practice their beliefs, then they are living a kind of schizoid existence in which they both make an absolute commitment and break it at the same time.

The contention is that Macmurray is right to emphasise that there is a necessary relationship between religious belief and religious practice, but that he is wrong to identify religious practice as logically prior to religious belief. The New Testament suggests that religious belief is constitutive of religious practice, and the relationship between the two may be thought of in terms of the upper limit of the locution 'belief in'. This means that whilst religious belief/practice is a response to aspects of ordinary experience, it aims at the development and, in part, the transformation of ordinary experience.

Conclusion

According to Macmurray, religious belief arises from the fracturing of lived experience. The function of religious belief is the restoration and the preservation of the wholeness of immediate experience. More particularly, religious belief arises as part of religious reflection in response to the 'problem of the personal'. The problem of the personal is that of establishing a relationship of communion with other persons, and this is a problem in so far as the fear motive continually threatens to drive people and social groups into egocentric patterns of action. Moreover, egocentricity is a problem in that the analysis of childhood reveals, according to Macmurray, that communion is the most fundamental condition of human freedom.

Religion, in Macmurray's view, tackles the problem of the personal by preserving, extending, and recovering human community. It achieves this end through liturgy, mystical reflection and theology. In its ritual practices, religion aims to engage the worshipper in practices which symbolise and celebrate their oneness as part of a wider community. In contemplation, the worshipper as subject reflects evaluatively on the community and comes to feel the absolute value of fellowship and the relative value of other subsidiary values. In the construction of religious beliefs, religious people aim at interpreting the world in such a way as to demonstrate that the highest good of humankind is found in fellowship; that the human environment supports and sustains the aspiration to fellowship; and that there are ways of overcoming human alienation. Macmurray has clear ideas about the logical direction in which religious belief qua religious belief should develop. He argues that mature religious belief is necessarily personalist in its view of the universe and God, for this is the form of belief which can best make sense of human experience and engender exocentric actions.

The discussion of Macmurray's analysis has suggested the strength of his view that religious belief arises as a response to some problem which is found in ordinary experience: his epistemology implies this, and his argument from the universality of religion supports his case. Moreover, the fact that Macmurray's way of understanding religion can suggest interesting and potentially fruitful ways of viewing a range religious issues lends weight to his perspective.

However, there has also been reason to be critical of Macmurray. One argument has been that Macmurray's assertion, that religion arises in response to the 'problem of the personal', is suspect. It has been held that if religion really is the mode of reflection which aims to establish community, one would expect a more direct correlation than there appears to be between participating in religious activities and acting exocentrically. Again, it has been argued that Macmurray's own work strains against the procrustean bed that is the 'problem of the personal': Macmurray implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, tends towards seeing religion as a response to the apprehension of the divine presence in ordinary experience. It has been held that had Macmurray asserted such a view more consistently, it

might have enabled him to overcome some tensions evident in his discussion of themes such as the 'unity of the universe' and 'revelation'.

Another criticism has been that Macmurray misleadingly suggests that religious belief plays a relatively passive role in relation to ordinary experience. The argument has been put that both Macmurray's own work and the New Testament itself can be held to support a more dynamic and transformatory role for religious belief. Religious belief, it is held, is not only an attempt to articulate that which is experienced, it is also an attempt to go beyond that which can be determined from ordinary experience and to develop religious insight. Moreover, in so far as religious belief is a form of 'belief in', it follows that the logic of religious belief is that it must express itself in a form of practice. Yet 'belief in' presupposes 'belief that', and in that sense theory remains logically prior to practice.

Chapter 4

John Baillie: Moral Experience, Personal Knowledge, and Religious Belief

John Baillie addresses the question of the relation between religious belief and ordinary experience in his analysis of religious experience. He asserts that religious belief arises out of religious experience which is sui generis. He also maintains that religious experience is an inherent part of the ordinary experience of humankind, so that religious belief arises out of certain universal features of human experience. A further contention which Baillie makes is that religious experience is a kind of personal knowledge, and that human beings are constituted as personal by their religious experience. The view that personhood is dependent on religious experience may appear to be overly hard on atheists, but in so far as Baillie claims that all enjoy religious experience, the appearance of harshness is deceptive.

In this chapter and the next, I intend to explore Baillie's analysis of the relationship between religious experience and religious belief. The current chapter will be given over to the exposition of Baillie's work. It will begin with a discussion of Baillie's understanding of religious experience, and it will move on to the discussion of the relationship, as Baillie sees it, between religious experience and religious belief. The thesis of this chapter is that Baillie views religious belief as arising out of a universal moral awareness: religious belief is a kind of perceptual belief which arises out of the experience of perceiving or intuiting universal moral demands. Baillie argues that the most complete analysis of religious experience is that it is an encounter with a personal God, and he further suggests that this encounter is constitutive of human personhood. Moreover, Baillie argues that sophisticated religious beliefs such as are found in credal statements and theological discourse are attempts to draw out that which is latent in religious experience, and, in particular, they represent the attempt to draw out the implications of the

perceptual beliefs which are part of religious experience. Following on from the exposition of Baillie's work, Chapter Five will offer an in-depth evaluation of Baillie's thesis.

S1 The Nature and Extent of Religious Experience

S1.1 The Character of Religious Experience

One of the ways in which Baillie chooses to analyse religious experience is to examine his own experience. One good example of this are his frequent discussions of his own religious experience as a child.[1] This is an a posteriori discussion meant to bring out what was implicit in Baillie's experience as a child. He is not claiming that he was focally aware as a child of the different dimensions of his experience, though his analysis suggests to him that as a child he was aware of something beyond the natural world:

> Why do I believe in God? I believe in God because He confronts me with a demand that brooks no refusal. He stands at my heart's door and knocks. He is there now. I know quite well that He is there, and I know that He wants more of me than I have yet given Him. All my life through I have been aware of His presence. I can dimly remember when I was four years old, and I am quite sure that in some kind of way I was aware of His presence even then.[2]

Baillie claims that his early religious awareness was overwhelmingly a feeling of being responsible to a transcendent other. Baillie writes of his childhood acceptance of the authority which his parents wielded over him, but also of his sense that they themselves were under authority.[3] The obligation that he and his parents bore to this greater authority was to live in obedience to it. Baillie maintains that the obedience that was demanded was to entrust oneself to the personal other. To trust is to recognise the validity of the claim that the personal has on oneself and to entrust one's life to this personal other.

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[1] OG, pp.3-16; IP, pp.37-47.

[2] Edinburgh, New College, Baillie Papers, BAI-04-22, 'Why I Believe in God', Broadcast Talk (13.7.43), p.3.

[3] IP, p.38.

Thus, the obedience that Baillie is talking of is not the obedience that comes from being forced into a certain course of action, but the obedience that grows out of the recognition of the validity of an authority, and a willingness to submit freely to that authority. Moreover, in Baillie's view his early experience was of a demand which came with a promise:

> And I think that deep down within me I have always known that His demand was a rightful demand, and that only in the acceptance of His gift could I ever find a lasting peace and blessedness.[4]

Baillie is aware of the degree to which his early religious experience was coloured by his Christian upbringing:

> Clearly [...] my infant experience was determined for me, to an extent to which it is difficult to set a limit, by the long tradition in which I stood. I was born into a Christian home, and God's earliest disclosure of His reality to my infant soul was mediated to me by the words and deeds of my Christian parents. Had I been born into the first generation of human infants, or into a society of the most primitive kind of which we have any knowledge or record, my experience could not possibly have been what it was.[5]

For all that, Baillie is adamant that his early religious education did not produce his sense of the presence of God. Rather, Baillie holds that his early nurture in the Christian faith influenced him because it found a resonance with his a priori intuition of God. By 'a priori' Baillie means that his awareness of a power over and above the material world was a constant element of all his experience, but was not generated by his experience. So, when Baillie heard the Gospel stories he responded, he says, because he recognised in the stories of Christ the same presence which he already intuitively knew.[6]

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[4] 'Why I Believe', p.4.

[5] OG, p.5.

[6] 'Why I Believe', p.3.

S1.2 The Characteristics of the Sense of the Presence of God

There are two questions which arise from the discussion of Baillie's analysis of religious experience. Firstly, there is the question of the specific character of the putative awareness of God. Secondly, something must be said about the epistemic status of the sense of the presence of God.

According to Baillie the sense of the presence of God is the awareness of being dependent on someone beyond the material world, Baillie writes:

> So, in the last resort, we are not our own, because we belong to God. "In him we live and move and have our being." "Of him and through him, and to him, are all things." Our solidarity with our fellows, our dependence on society, our indebtedness to those who reared and trained and taught us, our debt to those who fought and died for us, our great debt to Christ are all but parts, some less and some greater, of our utter dependence upon God-our utter solidarity, as finite and mortal spirits, with the Infinite and Eternal Personal.[7]

In this sermon extract Baillie sums up his understanding of the ground of religion. In Baillie's view, human self-awareness and the awareness of being dependent on the not-self are the vehicles of an awareness of utter dependence on God. It is this awareness of being dependent which is the ground of all religion. There are, of course, many kinds of dependency. A woman can be dependent on a tree if she is clinging to it in order to avoid falling over a precipice. The relationship here is that between two dissimilar items, a being and a thing. The relationship of dependence between God and humankind is very different from this, for the human awareness of the God on whom they are dependent is an awareness of one with whom they share an affinity.[8]

To gain a clearer idea of what Baillie means when he talks of the awareness of dependence, it is helpful to consider what he has to say about the forms of human awareness. In Baillie's view, human awareness has a twofold aspect, it involves ordinary awareness and the feeling of absolute dependence.[9] Ordinary

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[7] Edinburgh, New College, Baillie Papers, BAI-03-56A, Unpublished Sermon, 1 Cor 6. 19-20.

[8] Edinburgh, New College, Baillie Papers, BAI-01-23, Lecture Series, Apologetics, L.16.

[9] Edinburgh, New College, Baillie Papers, BAI-01-09, Lecture Series, Dogmatics.

awareness has itself two dimensions: the feeling of freedom and the feeling of dependence. The feeling of freedom corresponds to the fact that humans are able to transcend their circumstances, by acting to bring about new circumstances for themselves. The feeling of dependence corresponds to the fact that humans are not completely free to live life as they wish, but are somewhat dependent on their circumstances and shaped by these. In Baillie's view, it is the dual aspect of ordinary consciousness that generates the contradictions of life. By 'the contradictions of life' Baillie is talking of the way in which human consciousness and life is marked by the frustration of one's intentions, such that humans live with an awareness of a tension between what they wish to do and what they are able to do.

The second dimension of human awareness is the feeling of absolute dependence. This is a universal form of consciousness, though it is possible to fail to recognise that one has this awareness. What Baillie means by the 'feeling of absolute dependence' is that humans experience their material environment as one whole, which is a point which Macmurray also makes; though Macmurray differs from Baillie in thinking that the awareness of the unity of experience is only occasional, for it relates to occasions where action is unproblematic.[10] For Baillie, humans are aware that the wholeness or integratedness of their environment is dependent on a personal other. The self is aware that it and its environment are together one integrated whole, and that as a whole they are dependent on God. This feeling of the wholeness of experience may be contrasted with the feeling of fragmentation that is endemic to ordinary consciousness. For Baillie, the feeling of the wholeness of experience is what we mean by religious consciousness. Further, the awareness of the world as one whole is best thought of as 'absolute dependence', for it is an awareness of being a dependent part of the universe which is one integrated whole and which is itself dependent on God. The awareness of absolute dependence is always found alongside ordinary awareness, and, indeed, the former is always experienced in terms of the latter. This explains why human awareness of the religious is always couched in terms of the temporal, the categories of pleasure and pain and is generally anthropomorphic in form. Whilst Baillie argues that

[10] At this point Baillie's reliance on Schleiermacher is clear. Gerrish sums up Schleiermacher's view of religion in the following way: 'Religion, in short, is a sense and taste for the infinite, and by the 'infinite' is meant the underlying unity or wholeness of the perceptible world - a unity that is not present to the senses like an object but reveals itself to feeling.' B. A. Gerrish, 'Schleiermacher, Friedrich', in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. by Mircea Eliade, 16 vols (New York: Macmillan,1987), XIII, p.110.

both forms of consciousness always exist together, he also maintains that religious consciousness ultimately aims at the resolution of the fragmentation found in ordinary consciousness. In this sense, religious consciousness aims at the restoration of the wholeness of experience that was characteristic of humankind in the early stages of evolution and of the animal world today.

In Baillie's view, ordinary experience and the consciousness of absolute dependence always exist together. The exact relationship between these two forms of awareness is one of dependence. Ordinary awareness is dependent on the feeling of the absolute, and this is because the feeling of freedom, which is one of the dimensions of ordinary experience, can only be explained by reference to the human awareness of being more than 'natural' creatures; ordinary awareness is constituted by an awareness of affinity to and dependence upon God. Thus, all ordinary self-consciousness includes and is grounded upon an awareness of God. It is in this sense that all people have an awareness of God, and, indeed, this awareness is constitutive of their humanity.[11] With regard to this latter point, Baillie states that 'if the eternal and the divine should cease to make any impact on his soul, man would no longer be man'.[12]

S1.3 The Moral Sense

Baillie's argument is that all people sense God, in that all people have an awareness of absolute dependence. The most obvious and specific form which this awareness takes, is the awareness which all humans have of bearing moral obligations, and, once again, this is an a priori awareness. Both in his early and later work, Baillie contends that all people have an intuition of value, and by this he means that there is a universal intuition of certain categorical or unconditional values or duties. The intuition of categorical values is said to be touched by psychological certitude, and, as such, it is a form of knowledge which is as certain as any type of human knowledge. As to the nature of the intuition involved in moral awareness, Baillie suggests that the intuition of value is analogous to sensory perception.

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[11] 'Why I Believe', p.4.

[12] 'Why I Believe', p.4.

> T*here is nothing of which man is more certain than of his primary moral values.* Loyalty and love and honour, truthfulness and purity and unselfishness - there is no knowledge of which I am surer (and perhaps no other knowledge of which I am in the last resort so sure) than that these things are infinitely well worth seeking and that there is laid upon me an absolute obligation to seek them.[13]

> Whatever opinions we may hold 'with the top of our minds' about the existence of God, there is *something* which every one of us recognizes as holy, and before this holy thing we are all ready to bow in reverence. [...] That which is truly holy to us all, and which calls forth reverence in us, is always some loyalty, some standard, some principle, some ideal - it may be only of sportsmanship or the honour of 'the old school tie', or of gentlemanliness or chivalry, or again of things like business honesty or scientific disinterestedness [...] In other words, where we meet the holy thing is always in some holy *demand* that is made upon our lives [...] Yet not all demands that are made upon us are thus associated with the sentiment of reverence, but only those demands whose right is recognized by us as being *unconditional* or *absolute*.[14]

These two quotations, the first taken from Baillie's early career, the second from his later work, illustrate Baillie's continuing commitment to the idea that all people have an intuitive awareness of certain ultimate values. By 'ultimate values' Baillie means that which is valued for its intrinsic worth, as against that which is valued for its instrumental worth. Thus a tool may be valued for what it can enable its owner to achieve, whilst truthfulness is valued for itself.[15] Since Baillie is primarily concerned with moral values, when he refers to 'ultimate values' he is referring to the knowledge which all people have of good and evil.[16] It is interesting to note here that in his adherence to intuitionism Baillie differs significantly from Macmurray. Macmurray holds that people are aware of the ultimate value of fellowship, in so far as experience reveals the practical value of community to the realisation of human freedom. That is to say, Macmurray holds that values arise on instrumental grounds. Baillie, in contrast, argues that there is the intuition of certain values which take their authority from an intrinsic validity which they have irrespective of their practical value.

Baillie uses a number of synonyms when he is speaking of the knowledge of moral value. He refers to conscience, moral consciousness, and the consciousness of duty.[17] In these different ways Baillie is

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[13] IR, p.342.

[14] OG, pp. 243-244.

[15] IR, p.259.

[16] IR, p.259.

[17] IR, pp.340-344.

referring to the putative awareness which all have of general moral principles. Thus, although we often, perhaps most often,[18] are sure of what our duty is in any particular situation, moral awareness is of general moral types or universals and is not made up of the intuition of moral tokens. That this is the correct interpretation of Baillie's thought is clear from the following quotation:

> No doubt there is room for uncertainty enough about the details of duty. No doubt it is often painfully difficult to know, in an individual case, what we ought to do. And we need not even deny [...] that there may be occasions for *some* honest perplexity even with regard to the broad outline of dutiful conduct. But we do claim that, in respect of this broad outline of it, the path of duty is as clear as any knowledge we possess, and that in our awareness of the call wherewith it summons us to follow it, we come as near to absolute certainty as it is ever given to the race of man to do.[19]

Baillie's words suggest that he views conscience as the awareness of the general principles of conduct and not as particular moral tokens. Moreover, he also makes clear that the moral consciousness is marked by psychological certitude. He writes:

> It may often seem impossible to know what to believe, but there is always something which is worth *doing*, and which we know to be worth doing with an assurance that constitutes an imperative practical claim on our wills.[20]

It is important to note that Baillie links the certitude of moral knowledge with its imperative character.

The essence of Baillie's case is that moral knowledge is marked by certitude in so far as it is:

> A piece of original knowledge - knowledge , that is, of the truth of a proposition for which we either cannot give reasons, or which is more certain than any reasons which we may afterwards try to find for it.[21]

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[18] Baillie agrees with Bradley that we are seldom doubtful what our duty is. IR, p.342, note.

[19] IR, pp.342-343.

[20] IR, p.342.

[21] IR, p.344.

Baillie's argument is that basic moral judgements, such as the rightness of selflessness, are *facts* which are recognised rather than the conclusions of human reasoning.[22] As facts, basic values are certain and give rise to psychological certitude. Moreover, since basic values are objective in that they are discovered and not created, then they have a categorical or law-like character: they are unconditional obligations. As Baillie notes, it is possible to explicate reasons why one ought to respond obediently to ultimate values, but these reasons are secondary, and do not compromise the unconditional nature of our basic values. Thus, for instance, whatever might be said of the positive worth of telling the truth, yet the value of truthfulness is not dependent on such reasoning, for truthfulness is unconditionally valuable.

The idea that ultimate moral values are facts suggests that human knowledge of these must be analogous to ordinary perception, and this is the view that Baillie takes. In his major early work, Baillie contends that humans have an 'intuitive certitude' regarding their ultimate values.[23] This certainty arises from these ultimate values being a priori principles of all human experience. Thus, in contrasting moral and theological judgements, Baillie writes:

> Surely he [Kant] is entirely wise both in affirming that there are certain ultimate ethical principles which are genuinely self-evident, and in denying that there are any specifically theological propositions for which a similar claim can be made. There are, undoubtedly, certain basic principles of our moral natures which stand in need of no proof and are susceptible of none-which are as little requiring or capable of being supported by priori evidence as are the Law of Sufficient Reason and the Law of Universal Causation and whatever other laws are recognised by logicians to lie at the roots of our scientific knowledge. [...] A self-evident proposition is defined as a proposition the contradictory of which is not rationally conceivable.[24]

In his later work, though Baillie still uses the concept of intuition, in response to the challenge of positivism he develops his view using the language of perception.[25] Thus, Baillie argues that ultimate moral values are given in perceptions, analogous to sense-perception, which yield knowledge 'of aspects or properties of reality other than those of which we are aware in sense-perception itself'.[26] Baillie

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[22] IR, p.344.

[23] IR, p.344.

[24] IR, p.245.

[25] SPG, p.54.

[26] SPG, p.54.

stresses that the analogy between moral awareness and sense perception is grounded in the fact that in both cases there is the perceiving 'of something not otherwise perceptible'.[27] The 'something' which is discerned by the sensitive conscience is an ethical property such as the rightness or goodness of an action.

Underlying Baillie's moral intuitionism there is the assumption that the universe has a moral quality: 'I shall say that the experience of religion consists in the perception of the supreme goodness or loveliness or friendliness or trustworthiness of the ultimate nature of things.'[28] Moreover, in that religion arises out of moral intuition, the moral quality of the universe reflects the activity of God:

> The outstanding fact of the spiritual life is not, after all, that we seek the Good (for that we do but brokenly and fitfully), but that the Good seeks us and lays upon us its imperious claim; and the primary data of the spiritual life are not the little things we succeed in *doing*, but the great things that we feel are being *required* of us by a Reality that far transcends our finite selfhood. And of the larger and longer story of humanity as a whole the same thing is true. It is not only a story of human faith, but also a story of divine grace.[29]

S1.4 The Relation Between the Moral Law and Religious Awareness

Baillie is clear that religious awareness has a very close relation to the universal moral awareness, 'it is always [...] in the context of duty and of goodness that religious conviction comes'.[30] There is, however, some ambiguity in Baillie's work as to the precise relation between moral awareness and religious awareness. In some parts of his earlier work one might think that he is proposing that the latter is a mere inference from the former.[31] Indeed, it may be that in his early career Baillie accepted Kant's view that God was unknowable.[32] In so far as he may have accepted this Kantian axiom, then consistency would demand that he agree with Rashdall that the 'idea of God' is an inference 'by

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[27] SPG, p.53.

[28] LE, p.161.

[29] PJC, pp.105-106.

[30] RR, p.215.

[31] IR, pp.349; 371.

[32] OG, p.166.

intellectual processes which, when fully thought out, amount to a Metaphysic'.[33] But, taking into account the greater part of Baillie's work, it is clear that his definitive position was not akin to that of Rashdall. The general view presented in his major early and later work is that the awareness of a categorical moral demand is also an awareness of a personal God. In an early work he comments that 'the real truth is not that man at last concludes that his values imply the reality of God, but rather from the beginning he *finds God in his values*'.[34] Again, early on in his career we find him writing that the awareness of the presence of God is not additional to moral experience:

> It is rather a deeper way of reading the experience itself and drawing out what is already there. [...]It is not merely that through our values we reach God or that from them we infer Him, but rather that in them we find Him.[35]

The logic of Baillie's position can be presented in the following way. In an apologetic sense it is valid, on the one hand, to show that the universal sense of obligation entails a theistic metaphysical view of the nature of existence. The ought implies an is. If one accepts that there is a universal moral imperative then this implies, in Baillie's view, that the universe has a moral quality and this in turn implies that, because only persons can be moral, the moral universe is derivative of a moral Being.[36] On the other hand, Baillie argues that in analysing the universal moral intuition it becomes clear that it is not only an intuition of moral imperatives, but also of the personal being who issues these imperatives. Thus, the most complete characterisation of the universal moral awareness, is that it is the awareness of the God who makes demands upon each human being. In so far as the moral intuition is at root an intuition of God, Baillie sometimes transposes the language of moral intuition into religious language. Thus, the intuition of moral demands can also be understood as the intuition of the love and perfection of God, for it is the intuition of God's moral character that condemns and challenges men and women.[37] Moreover, the awareness which all people have of moral imperatives can also be thought of as the reception of the

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[33] Hastings Rashdall, *Philosophy and Religion* (London: Duckworth, 1909), p.106.

[34] RR, p.240.

[35] IR, p.470.

[36] IR, pp.346; 349.

[37] OG, p.162.

revelation of God's will and character. Again, acceptance of the moral imperative can be construed as the submission of one's will to a personal God.[38] Finally, the rewards of obedience to the moral imperative can also be understood in a religious way:

> There is only one way in which a man can come to anything of Christ's peace, and that is by responding to His challenge. He will never know of Christ's companionship until he has yielded to His claim. He can know nothing of religion as communion until he has first known it as an answered summons. The glories of religion must always be hidden from those who evade its demands.[39]

S1.5 Revelation and Faith

Given his understanding of religious experience, Baillie has a distinctive view of revelation and faith. From Baillie's perspective in 'all true religious experience there is a mystic element - a point at which the soul is aware of immediate contact with God', and there are two aspects of this immediate relation to God, there is his revelatory act and the apprehension of this revelation by faith.[40] In his assertion that religion arises from a relation to the divine Baillie is clearly different from Macmurray, for Macmurray holds that religion arises from wholly mundane aspects of ordinary experience. Baillie, on the other hand, suggests that religion arises from certain mystical features of ordinary experience.

At the root of Baillie's reflections on human awareness of God, is the view that God reveals himself to all men and women. In Baillie's view, if God is to be known then he must reveal himself. In explicating the relation between God's revelation of himself in Christ and his revelation to all people, Baillie makes use of Brunner's distinction between general and special revelation.[41] In Baillie's view, special revelation clarifies and fulfils God's general revelation.

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[38] OG, p.163.

[39] John Baillie, *Christian Devotion* (London: OUP, 1962), p.62.

[40] Apologetics, Ls. 11; 12.

[41] OG, pp.35-41.

The key characteristic of all revelation is that it is a personal communication between subjects, God and human beings.[42] In Baillie's view, the how and the what of intersubjective communication between persons is beyond analysis, for such analysis must abstract and diffract the relation between persons. The distortive effects of the attempt to analyse personal relations is even more acute when it comes to the relationship between God and human beings, and part of the difficulty here is that God can reveal himself to people through any medium which he chooses.

If revelation is communication between God and human beings, what may be said of the content of this revelation? Baillie agrees with Kittel that revelation is a form of self-disclosure, in which God offers himself to human beings and calls them to share fellowship with him.[43] This means that revelation is not only personal in the sense that it is a personal address from God, it is also personal in the sense that it is his self-revealing and an invitation to share a personal relation with him. God, then, is both the subject and the content of revelation, for in revelation his mind, nature, purposes, and salvific will are disclosed.[44] Moreover, since revelation is personal it is a revelation in action. God reveals himself, as does a human person, by acting. The particular actions which Christians regard as especially revelatory are the subject matter of the Bible. Since God reveals himself in events this means that the revelation of God has a peculiarly historical character, and this is seen supremely in God's revelation in Christ.[45]

Baillie's understanding of revelation does not mean that he considers belief as unimportant; he considers that beliefs of various sorts are necessary to the sustaining of fellowship with God and others. But he wishes to argue that beliefs are important in the context of the relation established between God and human beings. This relation is established through God's self-revelation and the faith by which this revelation is apprehended. This means that both revelation and faith must be understood as arising from a personal relation.

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[42] IRRT, pp.25; 33-34.

[43] IRRT, pp.28-29.

[44] IRRT, pp.49-50.

[45] IRRT, pp.49-50.

If God is only known in and through revelation, it is also true that he is only known as revelation is apprehended by faith. Faith, for Baillie, is understood as a mode of experience or apprehension. Faith is a form of sensing which is analogous to other human senses such as sight or touch.[46] Thus the concept of faith does not refer to a particular belief or set of beliefs, but to a mode of awareness. Faith, in Baillie's view, is always God's gift for it is the apprehension of the God who gives himself to be known, and who could not be known otherwise. In this sense faith is not an innate human possibility.

In analysing faith, Baillie suggests that it has two component parts. Firstly, faith involves trusting in the veridical nature of one's sensing of God.[47] Secondly, faith involves placing one's trust in the reality which one senses. Another way of describing such 'trust in', is to say that faith involves belief in the reality which one senses.[48] In Baillie's view, 'belief in' involves holding certain ideas which are descriptive of the reality which one intuits, but also acting in terms of that reality.

In discussing faith, Baillie is careful to say that faith is not grounded on religious experience, for this would be to suggest that faith is subsequent to religious experience.[49] Rather, religious experience contains faith or, more correctly, religious experience arises from faith. Faith is the cognitive component of religious experience: it is the primary apprehension of the religious reality. Faith gives rise to the emotional and volitional dimensions of religious experience.[50]

S1.6 The Personal Character of the Sense of the Presence of God

In the discussion of revelation and faith it has been said that, for Baillie, the sense of the presence of God is a form of personal or interpersonal knowledge. The idea of interpersonal knowledge is not self-evident; nor is it obvious how one can speak of the relationship between human beings and God as

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[46] SPG, p.66.

[47] SPG, p.72.

[48] SPG, p.82.

[49] SPG, p.64.

[50] SPG, p.64.

interpersonal. One lacuna in Baillie's work is that whilst the concept of God as personal permeates his thought, he fails to give a thorough treatment of the 'personal'. Nevertheless, it is possible to infer Baillie's view of the 'personal' from his use of the concept. Before going on to do this however, attention should be drawn to a weakness that characterises Baillie's treatment of the 'personal': he tends to use 'personal' and 'personality' interchangeably.[51] The failure to distinguish between these two concepts is misleading, for the latter term is commonly associated with the unique dispositions of a particular individual, whilst the former refers to the generic features of humankind as a whole.

According to Baillie, there is a logical movement from intuiting moral demands, and being aware that such demands must issue from a personal being, [52] for only personal beings issue demands and make promises.[53] This suggestion leads to the idea that the sense of the presence of God is best characterised as an encounter with a personal God, an interpersonal encounter which is constituted by revelation and its corollary, faith. In Baillie's view, there is a logical necessity to regard God as personal in so far as the intuitive awareness of God is of one who makes moral and spiritual demands. Baillie points out that different realities constrain human beings in different ways. Thus, for instance, the wind forces one to battle against it, whilst the rain forces one to seek shelter.[54] In these two examples, it is impersonal reality which acts as a constraint. The constraint which the wind and rain pose is of a physical kind, they constrain the movements and efficiency of the human body. But, the intuition of moral demands being made upon one cannot be thought of as a constraint placed upon one by an impersonal reality, for:

> It is a constraint to be pure-minded and loyal hearted, to be kind and true and tender, and to love my neighbour as myself. And what could possibly be meant by saying that any reality of an impersonal kind could exercise over me such a constraint as that?[55]

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[51] OG, p.250; IP, p.118.

[52] The 'logical movement' involved is to do with the exploration of the intuition of value, it is not a movement from one thing to another.

[53] RR, p.238; OG, pp.244-255.

[54] IP, p.45.

[55] IP, p.45.

The point is that in intuiting moral demands one is intuiting the demands of a 'will' upon our wills:

> Morality is essentially a function of personality, we can feel no moral obligation to an Absolute who is not apprehended by us as a personal being - or, as Professor Farmer has recently expressed it, 'The awareness of God as personal will is given immediately in the impact of unconditional value itself.[56]

For Baillie then, the personal character of God may be inferred from the intuition of moral demand This suggests that God is personal as he is wilful, he has will. This in turn leads to the inference of other properties which attach to God as personal; among these are his self awareness and his awareness of that which is not himself, Baillie comments:

> But what must at all costs be emphasized is that from the beginning God meets us, not as one among the many objects of our knowledge, but as another Knower by whom both they and we ourselves are known.[57]

Again, the view that God has a will suggests that he possesses the ability to form intentions, and also the ability to communicate his will, that is God is an agent. The doctrines of providence and revelation are, in Baillie's view, two of the ways in which the Church has borne witness to God's action. In the doctrine of revelation Christians affirm that God has been active in revealing truth to human beings, whilst in the doctrine of providence Christians assert that all historical progress has been brought about through the action of a gracious God.[58]

Baillie is insistent that God, as personal, is a concrete existent being. By this is meant that God is not to be construed as the moral law or a spiritual principle.[59] In arguing this case, Baillie stresses that essence and existence cannot be separated, they are 'two aspects of the being of whatever has being'.[60]

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[56] OG, 244-245.

[57] OG, p.220.

[58] PJC, pp.106-107.

[59] IP, pp.44-45.

[60] IP, p.45.

That is, it is incorrect to suggest that God is abstract essence, goodness, or love, without also being a particular existent being, for he is both essence and existence at one and the same time.

It is most important for Baillie to argue that God has a concrete existence, for only discrete entities can enter into relation with one another. It is because God is personal in this sense that he can enter into relationship with human beings. Baillie follows Webb in describing the encounter with God as being like an encounter with another human being.[61] One of the key characteristics of an encounter with another human being is that, in knowing the other, the knower is aware of being known.[62] This reciprocity means that those others whom a person enters into relation are always to be addressed as subjects, and in the same way when a human encounters God he encounters a thou.

In discussing the personal character of the encounter with God, Baillie points out that God's omnipresence means that, unlike human beings, he is always a thou, he is never appropriately spoken of in the third person.[63] The encounter with God is of a being who is always present and ready for an personal relationship, and, in this sense, the divine-human relationship is more intensely personal than any other relationship into which human beings may enter. Part of what this means, is that humans ought never to attempt to treat God as a means to an end, he is always an end in himself. Of course, in theology God must be spoken of in the third person, but strictly speaking this is a way of speaking of him which is alien to his being for God is always subject and knower and never object.

The impropriety of speaking of God in the third person is part of the reason why Baillie argues that theological knowledge must ever be fragmentary and theological discourse must always be dialectical:

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[61] OG, p.219.

[62] OG, p.221.

[63] OG, p.222.

> When we forsake the mode of address which is the mode of prayer, our thought breaks up into dialectic, that is, is refracted in two contrary directions, so that no one statement we make about God can ever be quite true unless it is supplemented and corrected by what, from this detached and third-personal point of view, appears to be its opposite.[64]

The encounter between human beings and God in religious experience is also personal, in the sense that it is the ground of human personality, and the vehicle through which humans recognise themselves as personal - Baillie at this point is at odds with Macmurray's assertion that religious concepts and language arise first of all as ways of describing purely human phenomena. Baillie considers that 'human nature' describes the particular human way of personal existence. It might be said that if, in Baillie's view, it is God's prerogative to address human kind, it is human nature to be addressed by God, thus:

> The truth is that there is in man no *nature* apart from *revelation*. Human nature is constituted by the self-disclosure to this poor dust of the Spirit of the living God.[65]

Since not all human beings are Christians, it is clear that the specific awareness of God that is given to Christians is not the same as that which is constitutive of human nature. Thus, Baillie is suggesting that it is the universal awareness of God that is constitutive of human nature.[66]

In so far as human nature is constituted by the awareness of God, this means that the distinctive feature of human existence is that human beings have moral and spiritual awareness.[67] In taking such a view, Baillie distances himself from a static view of human nature as a deposit of properties amongst which are belief in God and a conscience.[68] Human nature is dynamic in the sense that it is constituted by man's appropriation of God's revelation. Human nature is also dynamic in the sense that it grows and is shaped by the development of religious ideas.[69]

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[64] OG, p.225.

[65] OG, pp.41-42.

[66] SPG, p.89.

[67] IP, p.40.

[68] OG, p.41.

[69] OG, p.41.

In tying human nature so closely to an awareness of God, Baillie tends to the view that there is no hard and fast dividing line between the 'saved' and the 'unsaved'. Since all people are humans then none are totally out of fellowship with God. Moreover, if we think of salvation as fellowship with God, then Baillie's argument may lead to the conclusion that non shall be utterly lost in an eschatological sense.[70] When Baillie poses the rhetorical question, 'are there men and women from whose natures all possibility of higher desires have disappeared and whom no appeal of divine love could ever hope to touch', his logic suggests that the answer must be, no![71] One underlying assumption that Baillie makes here must be highlighted and this is that, in distinction to Brunner, he does not want to distinguish between God's activity in relation to all men and women, and his action in relation to those who are 'in Christ'. In Baillie's view, wherever men and women are aware of God, God is active in a salvific manner.[72] This is an important point, and it may be summarised by saying that, for Baillie, God's grace is indivisible.

As well as the claim that human personalness is constituted by the divine-human relation, Baillie also argues that human beings are aware of themselves as personal by analogy from their knowledge of the personalness of God. In arguing in this way, Baillie rejects the approach of those like Macmurray who regard 'personality as an essential human attribute which we observe actualized in ourselves and in our neighbours' and which theology has the task of 'extending and refining [...] to make it applicable to God'.[73] In opposition to this approach, Baillie argues that 'the personal' is an a priori concept which arises from the human awareness of God.[74] Baillie suggests that as part of their intuited awareness of God, human beings are aware of God as personal. They are aware of their own personalness by analogy from this intuition; though it must be stressed that the intuition of God has a logical and not a temporal priority.[75] Baillie agrees with Webb's argument that the modern concern with personality grew out of the Church's discussion of trinity and incarnation, and he takes the historical evidence produced by

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[70] OG, p.96; LE, p.245.

[71] LE, p.245.

[72] OG, p.101.

[73] OG, p.250.

[74] OG, p.251.

[75] LE, p.194; SPG, pp. 118-119.

Webb as supportive of his own philosophical argument.[76] Webb's argument supports Baillie's contention, or so it is suggested, in that the notions of incarnation and trinity arose from the Church's awareness of God as personal, for 'the conviction that personality is our highest value did not come into the world independently of the conviction of God's reality, but by way of it'.[77]

The fact that the divine-human relation is the source of human personality suggests that there must be dysanalogies as well as analogies between it and human personal relationships. God is omnipotent, immutable, impassable and infinite and in this sense the divine-human relation cannot be wholly analogous to a human, interpersonal relationship. Baillie makes this point with reference to God's omnipresence. Part of what it means to say that God is omnipresent, is that he is able to reveal himself through a host of media in ways which are unavailable to human beings.[78] Thus, for instance, God can reveal himself through the inanimate world in a way that is quite unique to him. Humans are able to reveal themselves through their bodies; God, who is without body, reveals himself through the world, human persons, and supremely through Jesus Christ.[79] God's omnipresence means also that his knowledge always precedes human knowledge of him, so he is always the one who addresses and the human role is to respond to his address.[80] A further implication of God's omnipresence, is that God is not only the 'thou' whom humans encounter, but the one who enables humans to respond to his address. Thus, God is present on both sides of the divine- human encounter, he is both transcendent of and immanent in human awareness. All this means that divine-human encounter is in some important respects quite unique.[81]

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[76] SPG, pp.118-119; OG, p.219; LE, p.194.

[77] LE, p.194.

[78] OG, p.222.

[79] OG, p.222.

[80] OG, p.222.

[81] OG, p.238.

S1.7 Awareness of God a Universal Awareness

One of the most surprising claims that Baillie makes is that the awareness of the presence of God is a universal awareness, all people have this awareness. Whilst Baillie claims that the empirical evidence backs up this claim, in that all societies appear to exhibit a religious awareness, it is important to stress that his claim is based on logical argument.[82] As has been seen, Baillie claims that his own experience shows that he had an awareness of God distinct from and not created by his nurture in the Christian faith. Thus he claims that his awareness of God's presence was a priori. If his awareness of the divine was a priori, it is reasonable to conclude that this is an awareness that all people will have. It is upon such a process of argument that Baillie bases his claim that all people have an awareness of God's presence. Moreover, he argues that this conclusion is consistent with the teaching of the Bible.[83]

S1.8 The Problem of Unbelief

One of the obvious difficulties facing Baillie's postulation of a universal sense, is that there are people who claim to have no awareness of God. The problem for Baillie is to allow for the integrity of these people, whilst still claiming that all have an awareness of the divine. One way in which Baillie seeks to resolve this tension, is to claim that there are people who, though they think themselves to be unaware of God, do by their actions show that they are both aware of God and have an authentic faith in him. That is, Baillie argues that where one finds people disposed to act morally, there one has found people of faith.[84] Thus, where we find love, loyalty, righteousness, honour, chivalry, and unselfishness, there 'we have an unshifting platform on which all good men may meet'.[85]

But, if it is possible to have faith in God without being aware of God how are we to understand this faith? The ground of Baillie's claim that there can be unrecognised faith is a distinction between two forms of awareness. The two forms of awareness can be described, in Polanyi's words, as tacit and focal

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[82] OG, p.6.

[83] Romans 1.14; 19-21 and 2.14-15.

[84] OG, p.66; also John Baillie *The Prospects of Spiritual Renewal* (Edinburgh:[n. pub.] ,1943), p.8; John Baillie, *A Reasoned Faith* (London: OUP, 1963), p.42.

[85] RR, p. 214.

awareness. Clearly, unrecognised faith is faith which is tacit, it is faith in the bottom of one's heart but not the top of one's mind.[86] Tacit faith will involve an awareness of God which includes trust in the veracity of this apprehension. Thus, there is an element of assent and trust in hidden faith. Moreover, tacit faith will also involve the willingness to act in terms of the reality of which one is aware, for this is the meaning of saying that faith involves trust. Thus, the most explicit expression of tacit faith is found in the fact that a person is aware of moral distinctions, talks in terms of reverence, holiness, obligation and conscience,[87] and acts in terms of an intuitive sense of right and wrong, true and false, beautiful and ugly.[88]

We have seen above that Baillie accounts for those who claim no awareness of God, by arguing that at least some of them do have such an awareness, and that this is shown in the way in which they act. But what of those who do not act morally? Baillie clearly allows that it is possible to live as though God does not exist, but this is not an entirely realisable possibility.[89] It is not possible to live without an awareness of God because all do have, as a matter of fact, an intuitive sense of God. Baillie believes that the attempt to avoid the presence of God leads to inner tensions expressed in a sense of 'loss', a feeling of being judged and found wanting, and a bad conscience.[90] Again, the attempt to live apart from God gives rise to a sense of 'care', which is the awareness that in refusing to accede to the demands of God a person is refusing what they know they deep down wish to accept.[91] Thus, for the person who tries to live as though God does not exist, God's presence becomes the haunting sense of a demand which is not being satisfied.[92]

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[86] OG, p.52.

[87] SPG, p.84.

[88] OG, p.72.

[89] OG, p.3.

[90] OG, p.11.

[91] OG, p.57.

[92] OG, p.163.

Baillie wishes to argue that no one, not even the confirmed practical atheist, is ever quite unaware of God's presence, and this argument throws new light on his understanding of faith. In the light of the discussion above, we must now say that Baillie allows for four forms of faith. The first and most developed form of faith is that in which God is explicitly recognised. In mature faith the recognition of God is expressed in a specific way of living. The second form of faith is that in which there is an explicit recognition of God, but no commitment to a Christian way of living. The distinction between these two forms of faith is the quality of belief that is found in them. The former involves a belief in the veracity of the apprehension of God which includes a commitment to act in terms of that apprehension. The latter includes a belief in the veracity of one's apprehension without the commitment to act in terms of that which is apprehended. According to Baillie, the difference between these two forms of belief is one of intensity. The former has an imaginative force which is lacking in the latter.[93] The third form of faith is that which is purely tacit and yet expressed in deeds. In Baillie's view, this is more nearly authentic faith than an explicit belief which is not accompanied by deeds.[94] Nevertheless, a hidden faith will fall short of an explicit faith for religious reflection is needed for the full development of faith. The fourth form of faith is that which involves a tacit apprehension of God which has no bearing on practice. This fourth mode of faith involves a tacit belief in the divine reality, but this belief is abortive in that it does not include a willingness to act in terms of the reality which is intuited, and this is the situation in which practical atheists find themselves.

Baillie's claim, that there is a group of people who deny religious faith, and yet are possessed by a faith of some sort, raises an important question. If a group of anonymous yet committed Christians exists, why it is that such people do not have an explicit belief in God? Baillie recognises that part of the answer to this question is that people may be gripped by honest unbelief. [95] They may have honest doubts about belief in God, perhaps because of the association of that belief with outmoded ideas, maybe because the idea of God appears to be unsubstantiated, or perhaps they misunderstand what

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[93] OG, p.102.

[94] OG, p.75.

[95] IP, pp.20-25.

religious belief involves.[96] Sometimes, Baillie contends, people do not explicitly believe in God because they wish to avoid the challenge which they intuit. All people intuit God, but not all people wish to offer him their obedience.[97] Where people wish to avoid the challenge which God presence presents, it may be that the tacit knowledge of God is suppressed through the desire of a person to be free of God's rightful demands on their life. In this circumstance, a person's arguments for atheism or agnosticism may be treated as justifications of their desire to avoid the claims of God on their life.

Baillie's work maintains that all have an awareness of God and it is of interest to ask why Baillie argues in this way? It appears that the universality hypothesis plays two roles in Baillie's work: it serves as the ground of apologetics and it plays an ecumenical role.

One of the advantages of purely propositional or evidentialist view of faith, is that apologetics, if understood as the attempt to bring people to a religious faith, is simply a matter of showing that one is justified in holding certain religious propositions as true. Baillie's view of faith as a way of experiencing the world leads to a more complex apologetical situation. The task of apologetics for Baillie, is to lead people to experience the world in a certain way. But how can people be brought to such an experience? In the view of Karl Barth, one of Baillie's protagonists, authentic religious experience can only be given by God, it involves God giving people the capacity to hear his word and to respond to it. In other words, Barth's answer to the apologetic problem is to assert that authentic religious experience is quite distinct from ordinary human experience. Baillie rejects Barth's approach on the ground that it presents faith as wholly the work of God, a work of God's omnipotence.[98] Baillie argues that Barth's view fails to do justice to the human role in faith, for it fails to allow that human decision and God's gracious activity meet in faith. Baillie's contention is that in analysing faith it is important to give place to the human role as well as to God's.

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[96] OG, p.59.

[97] IP, p.23.

[98] OG, p.24.

In distinction from Barth, Baillie argues that awareness of God is universal, and in this way it is part of the ordinary experience of all people. Because all know God intuitively, the apologetic situation is quite different from that which Barth envisaged. From Baillie's perspective, the apologetic task is to bring people to an explicit awareness of what they already know intuitively. The apologetic task is to bring people to accept a religious interpretation of their experience,[99] and this involves bringing people to the realisation that they are intuitively aware of a demand being made upon them; that the demand of which they are aware is that they accept something which they know to be for their good; that they ought to be grateful for this thing that they intuitively know is offered to them; and that the demand upon them is made by a personal being.[100] Baillie suggests that in practice Christian apologetics begins with the identification of those aspects of people's focal awareness which bear testimony to their tacit awareness of God. The point of contact between the Christian apologist and his hearers are those aspects of human focal awareness which point to God. One such starting point is the sense that many people have of being grateful for life and its benefits. Since one is only thankful to a person, then thankfulness is one indication of the human awareness of a personal being to whom they are obligated.[101]

The claim that there is a universal sense of God has implications for Baillie's understanding of the relation between Christianity and other religions. The claim that all have an awareness of God (which includes a moral and aesthetic awareness) leads Baillie to assert that God's activity can be traced in all of human history. All progressive movements in human life are ascribed to God's influence. Through the universal sense God was active in Socrates, Confucius, Gautama, Moses and many others.[102] Baillie claims that God's activity is particularly evident in the development of morality and even more so in religious development. Thus, the universality thesis allows Baillie to claim that God's self-revelation is encountered in all cultures and in all progressive movements. Further, Baillie claims that the 'Christ event' represents the 'fulfilment' of all God's wider activity in the world. 'In the gospel history

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[99] OG, pp.14-15.

[100] OG, pp.245-249.

[101] OG, p.244.

[102] PJC, pp.116-122.

[opinions Baillie] there is brought to fulfilment a divine invasion of our human life which is not totally absent from any history.'[103] By 'fulfilment' Baillie is arguing that in Christ is found a new clarity in the apprehension of God, which means that Christianity brings the insights of other faiths into focus.

S1.9 The Logical Status of the Sense of the Presence of God

According to Baillie, there are several dimensions to reality and corresponding to this there are several different ways in which reality may be known; Baillie's ideas here may be compared with Macmurray's notion that reality may be analysed in a threefold way, as the material, the organic and the personal, each of which is appropriately grasped from within the logical form which corresponds to it. Baillie maintains that in the sense of the presence of God humans have a sui generis access to the most fundamental aspect of reality, and that 'the sense' is perceptual in nature - a form of knowledge by acquaintance - and marked by a high degree of certitude.

Baillie's definition of the real is that it is that which is: to be real is to be.[104] Within reality there is a basic distinction to be drawn between that which is infinite and uncreated reality, and that which is and is not, finite and created reality.[105] In Baillie's view, the way in which the real is identified is that the real is that which constrains a person:

> The test of reality (which is the same as to say of being or objectivity) is the resistance it offers to the otherwise uninhibited course of my thinking, desiring and acting. Reality is what I 'come up' against, what takes me by surprise, the other - than - myself which pulls me up and obliges me to reckon with it and adjust myself to it because it will not consent simply to adjust itself to me.[106]

Baillie's view of the real is consistent with Macmurray's view that the other is known in the active encounter with the human environment. But Baillie's approach is a development on Macmurray's work,

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[103] PJC, p.118.

[104] SPG, p.32.

[105] SPG, p.32.

[106] SPG, p.33.

in that he is willing to allow that the human beings encounter both material and immaterial realities which constrain their actions.

Given his understanding of reality, Baillie contends that human experience reveals that reality takes three basic forms; the first two forms are types of finite reality; the third is infinite reality. One type of reality that human's meet is that of the material world, animate and inanimate.[107] Whilst the material world certainly limits human actions it is also to hand as a tool that may be used. Another type of reality are those other human beings with whom individuals share the world.[108] The relation of the personal reality to the material one is that the latter is an abstraction from the former, and this is confirmed by the fact that the child thinks of the world as personal in all its aspects. It is only subsequently that the child begins to differentiate between that which is personal and that which is impersonal. The latter is identified as that which lacks certain properties of the personal. The personal reality constrains the human being in two ways. In the first place, the intentions of a person will be constrained by the intentions of other people. If others have intentions which interfere with a person's own intentions, then these others are a constraint on action. But this first example of constraint is only partial for it can be overcome through the exercise of power. If someone opposes a person's intention, then providing the person has the wherewithal they can impose their will by an act of power.

Secondly, others constrain the individual because of the intuition that they have rights that ought not to be infringed. This intuition is an inescapable constraint for it does not arise from human convention, but from a reality beyond man which confers these rights on man; 'if "others [writes Baillie] are the real world", it is because they embody for me, in my encounter with them, something greater than themselves, an intrinsic right and a universal good'.[109]

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[107] SPG, p.34.

[108] SPG, pp.34-35.

[109] SPG, p.36.

Baillie's analysis of the constraints imposed by the personal world suggest a third dimension of reality. In his analysis Baillie identifies the constraint of morality (the rights of others) with a being who confers rights on man. In other words, Baillie is suggesting that morality and religion are symbiotic. Thus, the third dimension of reality which is intimated in the moral sense, is God. In Baillie's view, whenever there is talk of the rights of men and women the dialogue is moving in the sphere of religion.[110] Baillie claims that the Bible sustains his view that moral knowledge and religious knowledge are closely entwined, for the Bible maintains that to act morally is to know God (1 John 4. 20), and to know God is to be committed to our fellows (Matt 21. 40; 45).

In Baillie's treatment of the hierarchy of reality one is reminded of the ideas of Pringle-Pattison, his mentor.[111] Baillie's view is that there are three dimensions to reality; the material arises from the personal, and the personal arises from the divine. In this sense, the divine is the ground of all reality. Thus, Baillie is claiming that reality is experienced as one whole such that 'each diverse strand [...] is intimately related to and inextricably intermingled with all the others'.[112] Baillie claims that this view of reality as one whole in which the divine, the human and the material are inextricably linked is akin to primitive man's view, and also to the tacit view which people commonly have, for 'the world we know is known by us as one world'.[113]

Baillie contrasts the view of reality as it is actually experienced with, what may be called, the scientistic view of the world. Scientism tends to assert that reality can be wholly accounted for in terms of the categories of natural science: it asserts that 'my real human situation is constituted only by what physical science can tell me about it'.[114] In contrast, Baillie's view is that humans experience their environment in several different ways such that descriptive, aesthetic and religious statements are all appropriate ways of speaking of experience.

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[110] SPG, p.37.

[111] John Macquarrie, *Twentieth-Century Religious Thought* (London: SCM, 1963), pp.46-48.

[112] SPG, p.50.

[113] SPG, p.50.

[114] SPG, p.45.

S1.9.1 The Sense of the Divine: A Form of Knowledge by Acquaintance

A fundamental distinction of Baillie's epistemology is that between knowing a reality by acquaintance, and knowing by description or proposition.[115] The distinction here is between knowing about a thing or reality such that one can make predicative statements about that reality, and knowing a reality by having a personal acquaintance with it such that one can say 'I know X'; this is a distinction which bears comparison with Macmurray's distinction between immediate and reflective knowledge.[116] The relation between these two types of knowledge is said to be one of primacy and dependence. Knowledge by acquaintance is said to be logically prior to knowledge by proposition.

Baillie's view is that primary knowledge of reality arises out of acquaintance with that reality. This being the case, we must next inquire as to the nature of knowledge by acquaintance. In answering this question Baillie reveals himself to be an empiricist in so far as 'to be an empiricist is to believe that all our veridical knowledge derives from our experience and can be checked with reference to it'.[117] In so far as experience is the primary contact that people have with reality, Baillie thinks of human knowledge as emerging out of sensory awareness of reality. Knowledge by acquaintance arises from the immediate sensing of reality. By 'immediate' Baillie means not mediated by reflection. Thus, in Baillie's view, knowledge by acquaintance arises from a direct sensing of the 'real extra mental world'.[118]

Since reality has three different dimensions, Baillie suggests that there is a diversity of intuitive or sensory forms. The most obvious form of sensing is found in the five bodily senses. These senses yield an intuitive knowledge of material reality. But, in contrast to Classical Empiricism, Baillie wishes to argue that there are great number of forms of sensory awareness in addition to the bodily senses:

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[115] SPG, p.13.

[116] SPG, pp.15-18.

[117] SPG, p.20.

[118] SPG, p.52.

> Our lives would indeed be poor and savourless if we had no awareness, in which we could repose the least degree of trust, of anything in reality save what we can see and hear and touch and taste and smell. My contention will indeed be that we have even what can properly be called *sense* experience of other things than these.[119]

Baillie suggests that amongst these other senses are aesthetic appreciation, moral awareness and the sense of the presence of God. The relation of these senses to the bodily senses is that the latter are presupposed by the former. The bodily senses yield knowledge of the external world in that the knowledge given by the senses is not simply the intuition of sense data such as colour, sound or resistance, but is the grasping of the external world itself. In Baillie's view, sense data are simply the media through which the external world is grasped.[120] The finer or subtler senses, amongst which are the sense of the presence of God, arise through and with ordinary knowledge of the external world.[121] This means that the sense of the presence of God is in a manner a mediated sense. But the sense of the presence of God is also an immediate or direct sensing, in that it is God who speaks in, under and with the awareness of the external world. Baillie sums up his understanding at this point by suggesting that the awareness of God is a mediated immediacy. People are aware of God in, under and with their sensory awareness of themselves, others and the corporeal world.[122] There is no awareness and knowledge of God apart from the ordinary awareness of the world. Baillie uses his own experience to back up this latter assertion. By introspection, Baillie claims that as a child he became aware of God in, with and under his experience of his home, the Christian Church and the Bible. God was revealed in these different media, but through these media it was God who was revealed.[123] Baillie takes these reflections further when he suggests that the most important and appropriate foci of the revelation of God is the person, and this is because God himself is personal. Primarily, Baillie is thinking here of the person of Christ. Through the 'Christ event': the incarnation and the resurrection, God's presence is mediated to humankind. Moreover, through the awareness of God in Christ it is possible to perceive God in all of history. In the light of the presence which is met with in Christ all history can be viewed as

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[119] SPG, p.52.

[120] SPG, pp.13-18.

[121] SPG, p.89.

[122] OG, p.178.

[123] OG, pp.183-184.

meaningful.[124] More particularly, through the awareness of the presence which is met with in Christ we become aware of God's presence in other people. In communion with other people we find ourselves in communion with God.[125] Again, when we are in communion with God we find ourselves drawn to communion with other people.

One of the claims that Baillie makes for the sense of the presence of God, is that it is a sense which is touched with certitude.[126] By this, Baillie means that the intuitive awareness of God is characterised by psychological certitude, that is to say, to be aware of God is to be certain of being in touch with a reality. In this way, the spiritual sense is like all knowledge by acquaintance, for though it is sometimes difficult to describe what is known in propositions, yet:

> We may nevertheless enjoy the certitude of having authentic acquaintance with the realities they fallibly seek to describe. It is in this way that our experience is everywhere transfused with a certitude which pulsates through all our thinking, and whose pervading presence can on occasion make even of our most speculative theorizings something better than mere fantasy and baseless fabric.[127]

It is important to be clear as to what Baillie is actually claiming at this point. His claim is somewhat more modest than at first appears. He claims that in the exercise of the senses there is an intuitive certitude of being in touch with reality. This is to say, ordinarily there is certitude that the modes of apprehending reality afford real contact with an extra mental reality.[128] Baillie is not claiming that there is certitude with regard to the propositions that are made about reality, though his formulation would lead us to believe that there is certainty regarding the proposition that there are, in fact, different realities with which we are in contact.

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[124] OG, pp.186-187.

[125] OG, p.179.

[126] SPG, p.2.

[127] SPG, p.18.

[128] SPG, p.61.

The discussion thus far has dealt with perception as though it were purely an individual matter. But Baillie also argues that there is a communal dimension to perception and perceptual belief. In Baillie's view, the certitude that attaches to the perceptual modes themselves, and the certitude that may attach to our knowledge by description has a communal aspect. Whilst individuals perceive, their degree of certitude in their mode of perception, and their way of describing particular perceptions is connected to the confirmation of the community of which they are part. This is true of all perception. In bodily perception, one's trust in one's perceptual beliefs is strengthened and confirmed by the perceptual beliefs of others. According to Baillie, the same holds with reference to the perceptions of the finer senses. Christians are certain of God's existence because they are part of a community which holds that through the exercise of faith this reality can be experienced. Again, Christians may confidently believe that God speaks to them because they are part of a community which perceives that God does do such things.[129] Of course, in all forms of perception mistakes can be made. When a mistake is made the community can be the means of identifying the error. In bodily perception, a person may doubt that they really did see a flying saucer if no one else confirms the perceptual belief. In the same way, a Christian may doubt that God told them to do X if they discover that X is at variance with God's character as perceived by the Christian community.

As well as similarities, Baillie recognises that there are differences between the various forms of perception. Thus, for instance, he notes that whilst all reality is in a sense revealed - for acquiring knowledge is essentially always a passive activity, in which the human knower strives to bring his thinking under the constraints of a reality in order that his thought may conform to that reality - yet religious and moral knowledge is, in a special sense, revealed knowledge in that it involves God revealing himself to people.[130] Baillie, in a way reminiscent of Macmurray, suggests that in an interpersonal relationship each term of the relationship can only know the other if there is mutual revelation. This means that moral and religious perception is different in some respects from the perception of things.

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[129] SPG, pp.55-57.

[130] IRRT, pp.19-22.

S2 The Sense of the Presence of God, Religious Belief, and Theological Knowledge

According to Baillie, religious beliefs, as found in theological discourse and the creeds of the Church, are attempts to express and deepen the understanding of that which is disclosed in the sense of the presence of God. This view of the function of religious beliefs leads Baillie to view religious language as the attempt to refer to a reality which is known intuitively, and to argue that the development of religious belief must be governed by the framework of basic perceptual beliefs which informed the encounter which the early Christians had with God in Christ. Moreover, Baillie's view of the nature of religious belief leads him to a keen awareness of the limitations of religious reasoning.

If primary knowledge of God is found in the initial awareness of his presence, then the status of theological knowledge of God is that it arises on the ground of the intuitive awareness of him. More particularly, in theological propositions Christians seek 'to draw out the latent, intellectual content of the faith that is in them'.[131]

> What we do when we 'reason things out' [writes Baillie] is to try to bring to the light of full consciousness the real nature and the interior grounds of such knowledge as we already have, and then to add further knowledge to it.[132]

This quotation points to some important dimensions of Baillie's understanding of religious belief and the theological endeavour. Firstly, Baillie says that theological thinking is the attempt to reflect on the real nature of the knowledge which is already possessed. Part of the explication of the 'real nature' of the intuited knowledge will be the attempt to draw out the religious grounds of moral awareness.[133] Secondly, Baillie goes on to say that theological reasoning involves the investigation of the interior grounds of religious knowledge: part of the role of theology is to distinguish religious knowledge from

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[131] OG, p.93.

[132] OG, p.60.

[133] RR, p.234.

other sorts of knowledge. Thirdly, Baillie says that theological reasoning adds to the intuitive knowledge which is already possessed. Perhaps we may suggest two senses in which theological knowledge may be an extension of knowledge of God by acquaintance. In the first place, theological discourse emerges out of the awareness of the religious community as a whole, and not simply out of the awareness of one individual or relatively small group of individuals. Again, theology generates new knowledge in the sense that it seeks to generalise from knowledge acquired by acquaintance and it does this through processes of logical inference. One example of this would be found in the doctrine of the Trinity.

It must be said, however, that though theology extends human knowledge, the knowledge which it yields is to be distinguished from that given in intuition. One significant difference which Baillie identifies, is that theological knowledge is held with less certitude than knowledge by acquaintance. In knowledge by acquaintance people form perceptual beliefs which, in Plantinga's terms, are properly basic. That is, the beliefs which emerge directly from the intuition of God, because they emerge directly from perception are held with psychological certitude. In contrast, since in theology the theologian tries to reason from the ground of perceptual beliefs, her task is fraught with difficulty. The difficulty which the theologian faces is related to the fact that her conclusions are based on her own considered judgements. Since intellectual judgement is always more or less fallible, this means that theological conclusions are always liable to error.[134] Again, theological discourse is said to be inherently fallible in the sense that:

> When the revealed content is subjected to human reflection, it is, as it were, diffracted by our thought in several different directions, each leading to a result which is invalid, until complemented by all the rest.[135]

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[134] SPG, p.60.

[135] SPG, p.10.

In that theological thinking always diffracts revelation, theology must aim to describe its object from diverse points of view. If theology presents its object from only one point of view, it will tend to distort that object by isolating it from the whole of which it is part.

Theological thinking is, according to Baillie, fallible and therefore it is always in need of careful scrutiny and possibly reformulation. The criterion by which theological propositions are to be judged is the intuitive grasp of God that underlies the Church's theological efforts. The intuitive grasp of God is the criterion of judgement in that the intuition of God is indubitable:

> This means that his thinking [the theologian] has been invaded, and continues to be pervaded, by an infallibility, an absoluteness, and therefore a certainty, which he nevertheless remains unable to hold securely in his own very human grasp or, to vary the figure, to domesticate into the household of 'his own very human mind'.[136]

In Baillie's view, the fact that the theologian has a 'real' contact with his object guarantees or at least enables progress to be made. Baillie claims that the same is true of the natural sciences. The epistemic situation in the natural sciences and theology are similar in this respect: both forms of reflection aim to formulate in propositions that which is already known intuitively, and both realise this intention only fallibly. In theology, though the intuitive grasp of revelation may be indefectible, the theological formulation of revelation is always defectible.[137]

If theology logically arises from the intuitive awareness of God, the obvious problem facing theology is ensuring that theological thinking is correspondent to the intuition of God. Baillie's solution to this problem is to suggest that theology must operate within an intellectual framework which mirrors the reality to which theology is orientated, and in this regard Baillie's work reflects Macmurray's discussion of the function of the logical form in reflective activities. If theologians operate within such a framework this ought to ensure that all theological thinking is constrained by the intuited reality. In

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[136] SPG, p.10.

[137] SPG, p.6.

Baillie's estimation, it is the Christ event: his passion, resurrection, ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit which provides the theologian with his frame of reference.

> [The Christ event] provides the paradigm in the light of which all other events are to be interpreted; the frame of reference within which they are to be set.[138]

Baillie's case is that in the Christ event are found pointers by which it is possible to understand the God who is known intuitively. The God whom all people are aware of is, in a special sense, revealed in Christ, and this means that if the theologian thinks from within the Christ event, then she can be confident that her thinking is done under the constraints of the reality which she intuits - in this sense the Christ event plays the role which Macmurray gives to the 'logical form': it ensures that the thinker stays in touch with the reality with which she is concerned. But what does the Christian frame of reference consist of and how can we gain access to it? Baillie doesn't use this terminology, but it may be suggested that, in his view, the Christian frame of reference is constituted by the primary perceptual beliefs that emerged out of the Christian experience of God in Christ as found particularly in the experience of the early Church. That this is Baillie's meaning is confirmed by a consideration of the passages in which he discusses the content of the Christian frame of reference. In an important passage, Baillie comments:

> Christianity, then, is a way of living, which includes a way of thinking, a way of feeling and a way of behaving. It is the way which was first lived out in its fullness within the Pentecostal community, that is, the fellowship of the Upper Room in Jerusalem after Christ's death, resurrection and exaltation.[139]

In arguing that the Christian frame of reference is a way of living, Baillie draws on an interpretation of the earliest reference to Christ's teaching in Mark 1. 14-15. In Baillie's view, the message that Jesus

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[138] SPG, p.146.

[139] SPG, p.139.

proclaimed was that in his ministry God's moment of opportunity had now arrived and that all men and women were now called to a complete reorientation of mind and heart.[140]

> A Christian is a man whose face, like the faces of the Magi in the story, is properly orientated to Bethlehem in Judaea. It is there that he too finds the long-sought-for clue to the mystery of being, to the meaning of human existence, and therefore to the proper ordering of his own life.[141]

Baillie words, 'the proper ordering of his own life' are particularly important. The Christian frame of reference is that which brings into focus the universal demand that all people are aware of, that is the demand to put oneself into joint with the cosmos. What then is the particular way of life that God demands? Baillie argues that the defining quality of the Christian 'hodos' is that it is the way followed within the koinonia of agape. Koinonia is fellowship or community, and agape is the ethos of this fellowship. Baillie suggests that in the modern world perhaps the best definition of agape is friendship. The Christian fellowship of love involves God, others and oneself.[142] We are in fellowship with God in so far as we are in fellowship with our neighbours. Baillie suggests that the fellowship which marks the Christian way of life involves the experience of the love of God through a neighbour's love and the offering of love to God through service of one's neighbour. Love for God is seen, therefore, not in some peculiar emotion but in the service that is offered to those around.[143]

Baillie recognises that the designation of Christianity as a way of life leaves him open to the charge that he is construing Christianity as merely a form of morality; Baillie rejects this charge and is scathing of Braithwaite for offering a theory that equates Christianity with morality.[144] Braithwaite argues that the doctrinal and narrative content of Christianity are merely psychological supports to a moral way of life, and that the truth or falsity of Christian beliefs is of no importance. That is, Braithwaite holds that the

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[140] SPG, p.136.

[141] SPG, p.137.

[142] SPG, p.139.

[143] SPG, pp.139-140.

[144] R. B. Braithwaite, *An Empiricist's View of the Nature of Religious Belief*, (Oxford: OUP, 1955).

Christian way of life is not dependent on believing that the biblical accounts are true.[145] Baillie seeks to refute this theory by making the point that unless the biblical stories are held to be true they could hardly fulfil the psychological function that Braithwaite designates for them.

In Baillie's view, to call Christianity a form of life is not to reduce it to morality, and this is because the Christian form of life embraces acting towards God as well as men and women. The Christian way of life involves fellowship with God and others.[146] Further, the Christian way of life includes thinking as well as acting. Baillie construes reflective thought in a pragmatic light. Thought is a part of the Christian way of life in so far as it fructifies Christian fellowship. Another and more precise way of putting this is that the Christian frame of reference includes beliefs, in that belief is necessary to sustaining Christian fellowship.[147] But, if belief is necessary to the Christian way of life, which beliefs are necessary? Baillie provides the key to the solution of this problem in the following quotation:

> The encounter with the totality of this sequence of events, [Christ's birth, ministry, passion, crucifixion, death, resurrection, ascension and Pentecost] which we may speak of in the singular as the Christ-event, is the paradigmatic experience which issued at Pentecost in the *koinonia* of *agape*, the fellowship of Christian love, and has ever since kept the Christian faith alive in men's hearts and lives.[148]

The crucial beliefs of the Christian frame of reference are those perceptual beliefs which emerged from the early Church's encounter with the Christ event. Baillie identifies the core belief of the Christian frame of reference as the belief that, in the Christ event, a new age had dawned which had 'set the course of human history and of human life on an entirely new course for all time to come'.[149] Further, the early Christians perceived that the new age required a new way of life, they perceived that the way of life appropriate to the new age was that of koinonia and agape.[150]

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[145] SPG, p.142.

[146] SPG, p.141.

[147] SPG, p.143.

[148] SPG, pp.145-146.

[149] SPG, p.145.

[150] SPG, p.148.

We are now in a position to give a definitive view of what Baillie means by the Christian frame of reference. It is the way of believing, feeling and acting that characterised the early Church in its experience of the Christ event. According to Baillie, this frame of reference functions as the:

> Paradigm in the light of which all other events are to be interpreted, the frame of reference within which they are to be set. This includes not only the daily contingencies with which the individual has to deal in his own personal life, but also all that happens in the wider world around him; and moreover it includes not only contemporary events, but also all that has happened in the past and all that it is still to happen in the otherwise unknown future, giving rise alike to a specifically Christian interpretation of history and to a specifically Christian eschatology. In this way a single critically significant encounter is used to give significance to all other encounters, past, present and future.[151]

These words of Baillie's amply bear out the suggestion that the frame of reference functions, in his view, as the map of the ultimate reality which all men and women encounter. In this way, the Christian frame of reference brings into focus the universal intuition of the divine. More particularly, the frame of reference enables the Christian to think within the constraints of the reality which all people intuit.

S2.1 The Frame of Reference and Verification

In contrast to the view that the verification model only applies to natural science, Baillie argues that the model is applicable to a whole host ways of apprehending reality, not only to the apprehension of reality through the bodily senses. Concomitantly, Baillie is adamant that it is not only the bodily senses which give rise to knowledge:

> Against this [the view that only the bodily senses give rise to verifiable knowledge] I would submit that, whereas our ethical, aesthetic and religious knowledge is capable of verification and should constantly subjected to such, this must be carried out by a return, not to our experience of corporeal reality, but, as the case may be, to our ethical, aesthetic or religious experience itself.[152]

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[151] SPG, p.146.

[152] SPG, p.63.

One illustration of the wide applicability of the verification model is its application to musical appreciation.[153] Just as in natural science one's judgements are verified or falsified by comparing them with one's perceptions, so one might test one's judgement of a piece of music by listening to the music once again. The impetus behind such a procedure would normally be connected to doubts that had arisen with regard to one's initial judgement. These doubts might have been kindled by the opinion of others, or by one's own reflections or experience. Whatever the reason, one would verify one's judgements on a piece of music by a procedure similar to that used in natural science. This is to say, one would verify one's musical judgement by returning to the perceptual experience from which it had originally arisen or to which it related.

In Baillie's view, the verification principle applies to the religious sense as well as to the musical sense.[154] Indeed, Baillie goes as far as saying that the meaningfulness of a religious judgement is dependent on the possibility of indicating the conditions which would lead to its falsification.[155] Baillie argues that one might attempt to verify a theological proposition by referring it to the intuition which it purports to explain. It is at this point that the frame of reference comes into play. The Christian frame of reference is, as has been explained, a skeletal system of primary beliefs which emerge out of the experience of the Christ event. In referring theological propositions to the intuition of God what we must do is to refer them to the Christian frame of reference,[156] thus:

> No doctrine has any right of place within a System of Christian theology unless it can make good its claim to yield the best available explication of some constituent strand of that knowledge of God which has been revealed to the Christian community and received and enjoyed by faith; and it is only by appeal to this existent knowledge, which is precedent to all doctrinal or dogmatic formulation, that the true meaning and relevance of any doctrine or dogma can be understood.[157]

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[153] SPG, p.63.

[154] SPG, p.68.

[155] SPG, pp.67-69.

[156] SPG, pp.150-151.

[157] SPG, pp.67-68.

We have seen above that, for Baillie, Christianity is a way of life which is characterised by fellowship. This feature of the Christian frame of reference is of paramount importance when it comes to the verification of theological propositions. Just as basic perceptual beliefs enable fellowship, so the validity of a theological proposition will be connected to its capacity to nurture fellowship, though this is not to say that other criteria such as coherence and historical factuality are unimportant, only that they are not sufficient conditions of validity. The value of a theological proposition to Christian fellowship may be assessed by asking, 'what would be the practical consequence of attempting to live in terms of this proposition'? If the answer to such a question were 'none', then that proposition would be meaningless in theological terms.[158] Conversely, the capacity of a proposition to engender positive actions would be a mark in its favour; by action is meant:

> The total response of our spirits - whether in worship, meditation and prayer, or in sentiments and deeds of love - to the universal reality with which we are confronted, human and divine.[159]

Thus, the value of a theological affirmation is related, in Baillie's view, to the capacity of that proposition to explicate and strengthen the dispositions found in the Christian frame of reference.[160]

S2.2 Theological Language

If the task of theology is to reason out the intuition of faith what might be said of the status of theological language, is it symbolic or is it univocal? In discussing this question Baillie takes issue with Tillich's point of view. Tillich defines symbolic language as that which points beyond itself to an object or reality to which it is, properly speaking, improper. Thus, it can be argued that to call God Father is to use a linguistic symbol which properly refers to a male human being. This means that when God is called 'Father' then a word which is proper to human life is used symbolically to point to that which lies outside of our human experience, God. In contrast, non-symbolic language does not point beyond itself

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[158] SPG, pp.150-151.

[159] SPG, p.152.

[160] Fergusson has argued that the idea of the Christian frame of reference is indicative of Baillie's growing awareness of the cultural and contextual shaping of religious knowledge. (p.141) I would argue that Baillie was always aware of the contextuality of religious knowledge, but tends to emphasis this more towards the end of his career.

for it refers properly to something within human experience. Thus, when the term 'father' is used of a male human being who has a son the term is being used univocally and appropriately. In Tillich's view, almost all authentic theological language is symbolic; the only non-symbolic use of language in theology is found in the proposition that God is being itself.[161] In contrast to Tillich, Baillie is adamant that though theology must make use of symbol yet many of its concepts are non-symbolic. Following St. Bonaventure, Baillie argues that concepts such as perfection, infinitude and goodness are not symbolic in their application to God , and by this Baillie means that such concepts arise out of the intuition of God that is part of all human experience. This line of argument allows Baillie to contend that many theological concepts are, in fact, proper to the deity, and analogical only as they are applied to human beings.

Baillie nuances his view by arguing that concepts such as 'father' may be used of human beings in two senses.[162] They can be used in an empirical sense, to call someone father is a proper description of a male if he is the progenitor of a child. Again, 'father' can be used in a qualitative sense as when we say that a person acts like a father or has fatherly qualities. In Baillie's view, when 'father' is used in this qualitative way then it is properly applied to God and only analogically to human beings. Baillie's argument that many theological concepts are properly used of God, finds support in his further contention that if this were not so then it would be impossible to speak of God at all for, as Kemp Smith writes, 'by no idealization of the creaturely can we transcend the creaturely'.[163]

Baillie's understanding of the role of univocal language in theological discourse is at one with his general idea of theology. Baillie's view of the status of theological language is part of his argument that theology is a thinking out of the rationale and implications of what is already known about God through faith. Theology arises, in part, as the attempt to develop the concepts and beliefs, such as perfection and

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[161] See SPG, p.111.

[162] SPG, p.120.

[163] Quoted in SPG, p.117.

fatherhood, which are intuited as part of the intuition of the divine. In Baillie's thought, theology is not primarily an attempt to ascend to God through inference or analogy.

Conclusion

In this chapter, it has been shown that John Baillie argues that religious belief arises within the universal intuition of moral demands. Moreover, he also contends that implicit in the universal moral demand is the intuition of a personal God who makes demands upon humankind. In Baillie's view, explicit religious belief and theological thinking are primarily concerned with the recognition and extension of those beliefs which are an implicit part of the universal intuition of moral demands. More specifically, the move from the intuition of moral demands to religious belief involves the deepening and amplification of our intuition of moral value.

Baillie's work suggests that religious beliefs arise within the experience of perceiving God's moral demands, and this is to say that religious beliefs are at root loosely types of perceptual belief. The role of theology is to enable the refinement of the perception of the divine. Again, Baillie wishes to stress that religious beliefs arise within the context of an encounter with God, who is personal. Thus, if religious beliefs are to be understood as perceptual beliefs, they must also be understood as beliefs which arise out of the particular form of perception appropriate to a personal relationship.

The next chapter will offer an assessment of Baillie's view of the relationship between ordinary experience and religious belief. The forthcoming discussion will be particularly concerned with judging the soundness of Baillie's argument, that religious belief arises out of a universal awareness of value which is, in fact, the intuitive awareness of the presence and demands of God himself.

Chapter 5

John Baillie: the Ethical and Experiential Basis of Religious Belief

Baillie argues that religious awareness and belief arise out of ethical awareness. In this chapter Baillie's thesis will be assessed, and the argument will be made that though his moral intuitionism is a defensible position, yet there are strong grounds for questioning his view that religious belief arises out of ethical awareness, though there are important connections between religious belief and ethical awareness - part of the matter here is the sense in which moral experience is conducive to religious belief. It will be suggested, however, that by drawing on some aspects of Baillie's work it may be possible and plausible to argue that the primal ground of Christian belief is a universal, a priori awareness of the divine.

S1 The Ground of Religious Experience

Central to Baillie's understanding of religious awareness is his contention that the ground of religious belief lies in the universal experience of moral value. Baillie contends that religious awareness and belief arise as an inference from moral experience, he writes:

> Our values refuse to hang in a permanent state of suspension in the thin air of the ideal; rather do they, as soon as apprehended, demand a cosmic setting for themselves; or indeed they weave for themselves a cosmic setting out of their own substance, or, to change the metaphor, they unfold out of themselves a scaffolding that reaches down to the world of reality.[1]

[1] IR, p.346.

Thus, religious awareness and belief are said to arise from the deepening of moral experience. Baillie, in his last major book, makes the same point in a different way. In discussing knowledge of the 'real', he contends that the awareness of God is an inference from the awareness of the moral obligations which human beings owe to their fellows.[2] As has been said, Baillie is not here advocating an inferential argument from moral experience to the existence of God, as is found in the work of such as H.P.Owen.[3] Rather, Baillie's point is similar to that of Trethowan when he argues that the awareness of God is to be found in its most fundamental form in moral experience, so that religious awareness is essentially the interpretation of moral experience.[4] There are two contentions here that demand scrutiny: the first is the claim that all have an intuitive grasp of certain moral values; the second is that the moral consciousness is logically related to the religious consciousness.

S1.1 The Intuition of Value

Both in his early and later work, Baillie contends that all people have an intuition of value, and by this he means that there is a universal intuition of certain categorical or unconditional values or duties. The intuition of categorical values is said to be touched by psychological certitude, and, as such, it is a form of knowledge which is as certain as any category of human knowledge. Baillie suggests that the intuition of value is analogous to sensory perception.

Baillie puts forward four arguments for moral intuitionism which can withstand criticisms which might be levelled at them. Moreover, it is possible to successfully defend Baillie against some of the most powerful general criticisms of moral intuitionism. This is not to say, however, that the arguments for moral intuitionism are coercive, indeed the discussion below will highlight a major lacuna in the case for intuitionism, a point at which development is needed.

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[2] SPG, p.36.

[3] H.P. Owen, *The Moral Argument for Christian Theism* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1965).

[4] Trethowan, pp.86-87.

S1.1.1 The Introspective Argument

In some of his best known books Baillie defends his claim that all people have an awareness of God by an introspective analysis.[5] Baillie focuses in his analysis on his childhood, and claims that he was, as a child, aware of being constrained in his actions by a transcendent authority which made categorical demands upon him. The importance of this finding is that, in Baillie's view, it shows that he was intuitively aware of categorical moral demands and God himself prior to the development of his reflective abilities. This conclusion leads Baillie to the inference that if this is how it was for him, then it is in all probability the same for all others. That is, all people enjoy an awareness of certain 'ultimate values' being demanded of them by a transcendent authority. Thus, by introspective analysis Baillie claims to show that all people are immediately aware of certain moral constraints, and that these moral constraints do not devolve from discursive processes. Baillie further contends that the empirical evidence sustains his thesis[6], but he makes it clear that his case is not founded on such evidence:

> We know of no human beings, however backward or barbarous, who do not seem to be under constraint to some system of what are called taboos; and taboos are never conceived as proceeding *merely* from the will of the elders, or from any human will, but always also from some super-human source. Yet I do not think it is on such empirical confirmation that I should rest my own belief in the essential universality of such experiences. It is rather that I have difficulty in conceiving any mentality which was already genuinely *human* and yet did not in some way conform to this fundamental pattern.[7]

The argument which Baillie presents is a significant bit of evidence in favour of intuitionism, though its limitations should be recognised. The force of the argument lies in his claim that through introspection he can show that there was never a time when he, as a conscious being, was not aware of categorical demands and the one who makes these demands, 'no matter how far back I go [he writes], no matter by what effort of memory I attempt to reach the virgin soil of childish innocence, I cannot get back to an atheistic mentality'.[8] The point of Baillie's argument is that since he intuited categorical demands prior to developing his reflective powers, it is probably the case that all people have similar intuitions. This is a plausible argument which, at the least, suggests a thesis worthy of exploration. The limitation of the

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[5] OG, pp.3-16.

[6] OG, pp.5-7.

[7] IP, p.40.

[8] OG, p.4.

argument lies in the fact that if he only relies on introspection it is impossible for Baillie to judge the strength of the inference from his own experience to that of others. Moreover, there is always the possibility that Baillie's putative awareness of categorical values arises, not from intuition, but from his nurture within a strongly religious community.[9]

S1.1.2 The Case from the Christian Tradition

A second argument that Baillie puts forward is that which draws on religious tradition. Baillie, discussing part of Paul's letter to the Roman's, writes:

> To the Christian believer, he declares, God has revealed his righteousness, but to all the Gentiles He has at least revealed His wrath. 'For what of God is knowable is clear to them; God himself has made it clear. For ever since the creation of the world his unseen attributes, his eternal power and divinity, have been plainly seen in the things he has made; so that they are without excuse; because, though knowing God, they have not glorified him as God nor given him thanks.' And again, 'When gentiles who have not the Law (i.e. the Torah) do by nature the things commanded in the Law, they are a law unto themselves, though they have no Law. They show the work of the Law written on their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts rising up within them in accusation or defence.'
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> 'So that they are without excuse.' Little indeed do the Greeks and barbarians know of God and his Holy will, but they know enough to be far better men than they are! Such is the conclusion which this missionary apostle is concerned to draw.[10]

Though Baillie does not mention 'intuition' in this passage, the context of his discussion makes it clear that Baillie is claiming that Paul teaches something akin to his own position. And indeed there is a strong case that Paul's teaching is consistent with moral intuitionism.[11] In the passages which Baillie quotes above, Paul appears to suggest a double thesis regarding general moral awareness. Firstly, he holds that 'the moral law is somehow written into the creation'.[12] Secondly, he holds that there is a general intuitive awareness of 'the Law', and that the conscience is the means by which this awareness comes. Prima facie these two beliefs are not inconsistent with each other, and, in this sense, Baillie can legitimately claim that Paul, in affirming his second thesis, lends weight to his case.

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[9] IP, p.37.

[10] OG, p.7.

[11] For a different view, Arthur F Holmes, *Contours of a World View* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), pp.168-169.

[12] Holmes, p.168.

S1.1.3 Ordinary Usage

A third way in which Baillie seeks to sustain his ethical intuitionism is by an argument from ordinary usage. Baillie points out, following Newman, that in ordinary usage we speak not only of the bodily senses, but also of a sense of duty, a sense of honour, and a sense of humour.[13] This linguistic fact suggests to Baillie that we have a range of sensibilities which are analogous to the bodily senses, in that they yield original knowledge of the world, and prominent amongst these is the sense of moral value.

Cook Wilson, the Oxford philosopher, once commented that 'distinctions current in language [...] can never be safely neglected'.[14] Baillie assumes Cook Wilson's position in arguing that the varied use of 'sense' reflects real distinctions in the way in which the environment is known. One criticism that could be levelled at Baillie here, is that he does not take full account of the different ways in which 'sense' can be used. But this would be a misplaced criticism, for Baillie's discussion of the relation between the bodily and finer senses shows that he is alive to the differences as well as the similarities between the 'senses'. What he is rightly asserting, however, is that typically when 'sense' is used in ordinary speech reference is being made to a form of direct apprehension yielding primary knowledge of the environment. This being so, the common use of the term 'moral sense' lends support to the case for moral intuitionism and the moral character of the environment.

S1.1.4 The Phenomenology of Moral Experience

Baillie holds that all people are aware of a moral struggle. Indeed, he argues that the view that there are people devoid of conscience is a fatuous one for such a claim would involve the assumption of either moral perfection or absolute moral degradation: it involves the claim that one doesn't need a conscience because one is perfect, or that one is quite unaware of the distinction between right and wrong. This being the case, the question of how the universal moral sense is to be accounted for is a pressing one. Baillie argues that ethical intuitionism offers the best account of the phenomenology of moral experience; this is one of his strongest arguments in support of intuitionism.

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[13] SPG, p.52.

[14] Quoted in Passmore, *A Hundred Years of Philosophy*, p.244.

A key characteristic of moral experience is that 'ordinary evaluative thought presents itself as a matter of sensitivity to aspects of the world'.[15] That is, when an important moral decision has to be made, one assumption of moral reflection is that, given adequate attention, it will be possible to discover the right thing to do in the circumstances. Inherent in this presupposition is the view that in moral thinking people are 'in touch' with more than their own desires, and it is this that justifies Baillie's claim that moral intuitionism is consistent with the phenomenology of moral experience. Moreover, the case for intuitionism is strengthened by the inability of other approaches to offer an analysis consistent with moral experience, McDowell comments:

> When one or another variety of philosophical non-cognitivism claims to capture the truth about what the experience of value is like, or (in a familiar surrogate for phenomenology) about what we mean by our evaluative language, the claim is never based on careful attention to the lived character of evaluative thought or discourse. The idea is, rather, that the very concept of the cognitive or factual rules out the possibility of an undiluted representation of how things are, enjoying, nevertheless, the internal relation to 'attitudes' or the will that would be needed for it to count as evaluative. On this view the phenomenology of value would involve a mere incoherence.[16]

In claiming that Baillie's moral realism is a strength of his position the view is being taken that any ethical theory must do justice to the phenomenology of moral experience. Further, the claim is that the non-cognitivist views of such as Mackie do not do justice to moral experience for they begin with the premise, as McDowell notes, that how moral experience presents itself to moral agents is fundamentally misleading. Moral experience presents itself as having to do with a moral reality, but for the non-cognitivist this is an entirely misleading understanding which needs to be corrected by the moral philosopher. For the non-cognitivist, ethical judgements are not a matter of right or wrong, true or false, they are expressive of desires which, by their nature, cannot be true or false though they can be held sincerely or insincerely. If ethical judgements are the expressions of desires, the job of ethics is to trace the factors which condition these attitudes. One such factor, identified by Mackie, is the way of

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[15] John McDowell, 'Values and Secondary Qualities' in *Morality and Objectivity*, ed. by Ted Honderich (London: Routledge, 1985), pp.110-129 (p.110).

[16] p.110.

life which a person or group enjoys: 'People approve of monogamy [states Mackie] because they participate in a monogamous way of life rather than that [...] they participate in a monogamous way of life because they approve of monogamy'.[17] Again, Mitchell argues that morality is 'essentially concerned with the fulfilment of men's needs as individuals and as members of society with the necessary conditions of human well-being'.[18]

As against the non-cognitivist position, the view of this thesis is that the philosophical analysis of spheres of human experience must begin by allowing the prima facie validity of how things seem to those involved. It may be that subsequently the phenomenology of some experiences may prove to be misleading, but it is a fundamental methodological axiom that one does not discount how things seem to those involved in a particular experience out of hand. It is on these grounds that it can be said that the capacity of moral realism to offer an account of moral experience, which is consistent with the phenomenology of that experience, is one of its chief commendations.

S1.2 Some Major Criticisms Addressed

S1.2.1 Objectivity

One thing implied by Baillie's work is that moral discourse is, in principle, a discourse capable of objectivity. The concept of objectivity as used here suggests the idea of rational agreement.[19] The paradigm of objectivity, in this sense, is found in the explanation of natural phenomena. Such explanations are regarded as objective because they are based on evidence which is, in principle, available to all. Since, ceteris paribus, all have access to the same evidence there can be rational discussion over whether the evidence supports the putative explanation. Baillie's work implies that since all people, in principle, have access to certain common intuitions, then the moral judgements which arise from these intuitions have the potential for being objective judgements.

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[17] J.L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), p.36.

[18] Basil Mitchell, *Morality: Religious and Secular* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), p.107.

[19] Bernard Williams, 'Meta-Ethics', in *Philosophy: A Guide Through the Subject*, ed. by A.C. Grayling (Oxford: OUP, 1995), pp. 557-568 (p. 557).

One possible criticism of Baillie's intuitionism is that which points out that since moral discourse does not appear to fulfil the major condition of objectivity, then the inference can be made that it does not arise from universal moral intuitions. It can be suggested that the mark of objectivity in any sphere of discourse is agreement on what kind of evidence would allow an objective judgement to be made. Thus, in discussing a particular explanation of a noise around a corner there will be agreement that the noise was caused by a car, or that there is insufficient evidence to come to any probable hypothesis, or that the evidence might support a number of hypotheses. The point is, in moral discourse such agreement often proves to be elusive. Take, for instance, the abortion issue. It seems that this debate is characterised by the relative incommensurability of the positions taken up by the different protagonists. In this debate agreement is often hard to achieve because there seem to be no common set of criteria for identifying the types of evidence that would decide the issue. This instance and others like it have been taken as evidence that moral discourse is not objective, in the sense defined above, and that it is therefore not grounded in common intuitions.

There are a number of ways that Baillie might respond to the above criticism which, taken together, constitute a strong rebuttal. In the first place, he might point out that given the subtle nature of moral sensibility, it is inevitable that moral debate will be marked by disagreement. That is, Baillie's position is that moral sensibility is a refined sense and it requires careful nurture if it is to be used effectively, and this fact may explain why moral discourse is often marked by what appears to be fundamental disagreement.[20] It may be that moral disagreement does not indicate the absence of a trans-subjective reality or of universal moral intuitions, only that agreement is inherently more problematic in moral discourse, for the capacity to correctly perceive the right and the good varies enormously between people. An analogy here is found in the sphere of wine tasting. No one doubts that there are good and bad wines, but it may be well-nigh impossible to reach agreement on a particular wine. The disagreement over the quality of a wine may arise from the disparities in the development of the palates of the people involved in the discussion. In this case, lack of agreement does not indicate lack of

[20] SPG, p.55.

objectivity, but only the particular difficulties in reaching agreement in this area. Thus, the objectivity of a field is not dependent on complete agreement on questions of judgement, though if there were to be complete lack of consensus in a certain field it would be difficult to maintain that the discourse in that field referred to a trans-subjective reality.

Again, it seems likely that sometimes, for polemical purposes, the degree to which moral discourse is marked by fundamental disagreement is overstated. Even on the abortion issue it is possible to detect certain areas of agreement between those on opposite sides of the debate. This suggests that disagreements in moral debates may be due to differences in the way in which common principles are interpreted and applied. Thus, for instance, many in the pro and anti abortion camps might hold in common the belief that individuals have the right to life and well-being. The point of disagreement is whether and how this principle applies to a foetus and at what stage of development.

A third response, which Baillie might give to the criticism, is to point out that whilst people intuit certain moral absolutes, yet it is not always clear which moral principles will apply with regard to specific moral questions. Thus, a person living in a dictatorship might face the dilemma of telling the truth and putting her friends in jeopardy with the secret police or telling a lie, and in this way saving her friends from certain imprisonment. Both truthfulness and love for one's neighbour are 'ultimate values', and in this lies the moral dilemma of the scenario. The possibility of such moral dilemmas suggests that, in order to work out what our duty is in morally ambiguous situations, we must engage in processes of general thought by which we assess the implications of the various actions open to us, and the different dimensions of the situation in which we find ourselves.[21] It is only by such processes of general thought that we may come to a judgement as to what we ought to do in any situation of moral ambiguity. Moreover, where there are a number of morally right actions which we might pursue, the only way in which we can know what we ought to do is by deciding which are the greater obligations.[22] Thus, in so

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[21] H.A. Pritchard, *Moral Obligation: Essays and Lectures* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1949), p.8.

[22] Pritchard, p.10, note c.

far as people only intuit general moral principles, moral discourse is inevitably marked by disagreement, and this disagreement is due to the prominent role that human judgement plays in moral conclusions.

Finally, moral disagreement may be due to the fact that moral discourse is shaped to a large extent by the religious and cultural outlook of a society - Anscombe, for instance, argues that concepts such as ought and obligation historically arose in the West within the context of the Christian tendency to think of God as the law-giver.[23] But the recognition of the importance of culture as a shaper of moral discourse does not mean necessarily, as some have thought, that there is only a very minimal given element in moral experience.[24] Rather, an intuitionist position, such as Baillie's, can allow that moral intuitions are but one of the inputs into the moral discourse of a group or society, and that other factors, such as religious beliefs, will be of importance in shaping moral judgements. Thus, moral disagreements within and between societies may be partially explained in Anscomian terms without necessarily undermining the force of intuitionism.

S1.2.2 Facticity

Intuitionism has also been criticised for the proposition, which is inherent in it, that humans intuit a moral dimension which exists independently of a particular human awareness of it, and which can be described in terms of truth and falsity. This claim must be distinguished from the claim that moral intuition is objective, for it is possible for a judgement to be objective and yet not relate to a sphere that is distinct from the human mind; one instance of this is found in the statements of mathematicians regarding numbers. Baillie wishes to argue that in ethical intuition people intuit, not only a set of objective moral judgements but a moral reality. Such a view may be contrasted with that of J.L. Mackie who argues that moral values only appear to be objectively real, and that this 'objectivity' is a function of the projection outwards of human attitudes, wants and demands into the world.[25]

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[23] G.E.M. Anscombe, 'Modern Moral Philosophy', *Ethics, Religion and Politics: Collected Philosophical Papers*, 3 vols (Oxford: Blackwell, 1981), III, pp.26-42.

[24] Fergusson, for instance, argues that 'Our moral judgements are not so much the causes of our religious beliefs as their effects', David A. S. Fergusson, 'Orthodox Liberal', in *Christ, Church and Society*, ed. by David Fergusson (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), pp.123-153 (p.136).

[25] Mackie, pp.42-43.

For Baillie, the moral reality which people intuit is not to be construed as a free-standing moral law, but as the intuition of the demands that God makes upon us, thus:

> It is *His* perfection that rebukes us; it is *His* love that constrains us. Hence it is no mere law that is revealed to us, but a living Person, and what we call the moral law is but an abstraction which our limited and limiting minds make from the concreteness of the living Glory that is revealed.[26]

One influential argument against moral realism is that of Mackie who points out that since a moral judgement is the sort of judgement that appears to be intrinsically related to feeling the need to do or not to do certain actions, then it is clear that moral judgements are not judgements of fact. Underlying this argument is the Humean view that human motives are constituted by beliefs and desires, and that beliefs are mere inert representations of the world whilst desires initiate action.[27] Working from within this framework, Mackie argues that since moral judgements can initiate action then they are clearly not beliefs or judgements of fact, but expressions of desires.[28] This being the case, moral judgements are not factual, they are not true or false.

Mackie's argument fails as a general refutation of moral realism. The argument works well against intuitionist writers such as Ross who accept Humean psychology, but the force of the argument is dissipated once the basic Humean premise is challenged. Though Baillie does not explicitly challenge the Humean position, it is clear that he holds that moral judgements are both factual and able to initiate action; this duality is inherent in Baillie's claim that people are aware of moral intuitions as demands upon them. Thus, Baillie does not accept the basic Humean premise of Mackie's argument, and, as such, his position is untouched by Mackie's argument. Further, recent work by Nagel and McDowell tends to support the view that beliefs or judgements of fact can initiate action. Nagel and McDowell do

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[26] OG, p.162.

[27] Jonathan Dancy, 'Intuitionism', in *A Companion to Ethics*, ed. by Peter Singer (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), pp.411-420 (p.414).

[28] Mackie, p.40.

not say an action can take place without the presence of a desire, but they do assert that on occasion an action may be motivated by a belief, and that this belief motivates the desire that is part of action.[29] Dancy takes the argument of Nagel and McDowell one step further by suggesting, in a form of pure cognitivism, that one can sometimes account for purposive action without bringing in desire at all.[30] One example which Dancy gives of belief motivating action occurs in the simple event of a person crossing a road.[31] When someone crosses a road they may wait on the pavement until a gap in the traffic appears and then walk across. If the question is asked, 'why does a person wait on the pavement before crossing a road', the only explanation which is necessary is that the person is being motivated by their beliefs about how one can safely cross the road. In this instance it is unnecessary to bring desire into the explanation. Thus, in a case such as this belief functions as a sufficient reason or motive for action. The discovery that belief may be a motive for action provides the basis for arguing that moral judgements may be factual. If it is sometimes the case that a belief may motivate an action, then it can be suggested that moral judgements may be beliefs of this kind: they are beliefs that enter into actions as motives for acting in a particular way.

The discussion suggests that Baillie's argument that moral judgements are factual can be defended against Mackie's Humean attack. Since beliefs of a factual nature can motivate action, there is no reason for the a priori denial of the facticity of moral judgements, nor that they relate to a moral reality independent of the human mind.

S1.2.3 The Intuition of Non-Natural Moral Properties

Another possible criticism is that presented by Strawson who suggests that intuitionism fails properly to substantiate the idea that moral judgements are intuited or perceived.[32] Strawson's criticism fixes on the analogy, much used by intuitionists, between the perception of colour and the awareness of moral

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[29] Jonathan Dancy, *Moral Reasons* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), p.8.

[30] *Moral Reasons*, p.14.

[31] Dancy, 'Intuitionism', p.416.

[32] P.F. Strawson, 'Ethical Intuitionism', *Philosophy*, 24 (1949), 23-33.

reasons or the goodness of certain actions. Strawson points out that whenever the concept of a colour such as redness is used, it can only meaningfully be applied in so far as the person who applies it is presently perceiving redness or has the memory of a perception of redness. Underlying this argument is the point made by Moore that the concept of colour, along with the concept of goodness, is an unanalysable one.[33] If a concept such as redness is an unanalysable concept then the meaningful use of the concept is tied to a particular form of perception, namely the perception of redness. This means that if the concept of goodness or rightness is analogous to the simple concept of redness, then it might be expected, as Strawson points out, that the perception of goodness would have the features which attend the perception of redness. That is, if the concept of goodness is analogous to other simple concepts, then its meaningfulness must depend on the present intuition of goodness or a memory of such an intuition. Strawson claims that he uses the concept of goodness wholly meaningfully, and yet he has no memory of ever intuiting goodness.

The force of Strawson's criticism lies in the fact that whilst there is a transparent relation between the use of 'red' and an experience of redness, there is no such transparency in the use of 'good' and the putative experience of goodness. One possible explanation of the difference here is with regard to the inherent complexity of moral discourse. Whilst the perception of colour involves a relatively straightforward relation between a perceiver and the surface of a material item, moral judgements are the outcome of a complex doxastic practice. Moral judgements represent a community's response to a complex of inputs amongst which are moral intuitions, and the religious and cultural traditions of the community within which the practice is set. The complexity of moral discourse means that the connections between specific moral judgements and moral intuitions may be obscure, and this would explain why Strawson can claim that he uses 'goodness' without having any memory of experiencing goodness.

Whilst Strawson's criticism is, I believe, answerable, it must be recognised that he does expose a weak point in the intuitionist case. Intuitionism, as Strawson shows, necessitates the postulation of non-

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[33] G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: CUP, 1993), p. 59.

natural moral properties which are the objects of moral intuition. The problem here is that it is extremely difficult to give an account of what it means to perceive a moral property, or how these putative moral properties relate to the natural properties of a situation; yet some such account is needed as an underpinning of intuitionism.

One attempt to delineate the causal connections underlying intuitionism is that found in the work of McDowell. It is true, according to McDowell, that the perception of colour involves entering into a causal relation, but this causal relation is not a relation to the colours that we perceive, as Strawson contends.[34] The causal relation in the perception of colour is one between the perceiver and the properties of the surface which is perceived, and it is in the context of this causal relation that the perception of colour arises. Working with this account, McDowell argues that there is an illuminating analogy between colour and value. Just as colour arises in the causal connection between a surface and the perceiver, so value may be seen as arising in the connection between an agent and the circumstances in which the agent is placed. Just as colours exist in virtue of the primary properties of a surface, so values may be said to exist in virtue of the non-moral properties of a situation. Moreover, just as colours are thought of as real, so values may be thought of as real.

McDowell shows real ingenuity in his discussion of the perception of colour, but his argument is not wholly convincing. Though it is true that colour is not perceived, yet it is also true that it is possible to give a coherent account of the way in which the surface properties of an object give rise to the awareness of colour. But it is precisely an account of the relation of putative moral intuitions and the natural properties of a particular situation which Baillie's intuitionism lacks. Even a sophisticated version of the intuitionist argument, such as that presented by McDowell, fails to explain what the 'something' is that is intuited in a moral intuition, and how this 'something' relates to the natural properties of the situation in which it is found. Further, Baillie's argument that it is the demands and presence of God which are intuited in moral intuition does not obviate the difficulties which are identified here. Baillie's theological interpretation does not negate the importance of explicating the

[34] Dancy, 'Intuitionism', p.419.

phenomenal character of the putative perception of God, and the relation of this putative communication to the natural properties of a situation. The lack of such an explanation is an important lacuna in Baillie's work, and it represents a point at which his position needs strengthening.

S1.3 The Theological Significance of Intuitionism

Although we are primarily interested in moral intuitionism as a part of Baillie's analysis of religious belief, it is relevant to note in passing the considerable theological significance of moral intuitionism in its own right. Intuitionism has, for instance, important implications for theological anthropology: the way in which we think of human freedom and conscience is bound to be greatly influenced by the view that humans have an intuitive sense of right and wrong. Again, intuitionism has significance for our understanding of theological apologetics, for moral intuitions provide a starting point in everyday experience from which the apologist might develop the case for Christianity, and this is, of course, the tact that Baillie follows in books such as *Invitation to Pilgrimage*. Finally, intuitionism, in that it implies there is a moral dimension to the environment, suggests that the reality with which we interact is both material and non-material. Such a view of reality is a necessary assumption of the thesis that persons can interact with the divine, and to this extent intuitionism is a useful adjunct to a religious perspective.

S2 Ethical and Religious Awareness

In section one it has been argued that Baillie's ethical intuitionism is a sustainable position. This being so, the question now is whether it is plausible to hold, as Baillie claims, that the logical ground of religious awareness lies in the intuitive awareness of values. In this section it will be argued that whilst Baillie's Neo-Kantian interpretation of religious awareness suggests some important insights into the nature and ground of Christian belief, yet there are good reasons for doubting that Baillie has given an accurate analysis of the relationship between ethical and religious awareness. Baillie holds that the logical connection between ethical and religious awareness is so strong, that religion, as a universal

phenomenon, can be understood as arising out of ethical awareness. But, as will be shown, there are a variety of plausible accounts of objective moral knowledge which do not bring in religion, and this suggests that the logical link between the ethical and the religious is nowhere near as strong as Baillie believes. This being so, it is unlikely that Baillie's account can be sustained, although it is no doubt true that any account of Christianity - such as will be offered later on - which interprets it as a response to an encounter with the divine presence, will embrace moral intuition as one subsidiary dimension of the encounter with the divine.

S2.1 Moral Seriousness and Religious Belief

Part of Baillie's argument is that the intuition of objective moral norms when it is combined with moral seriousness, that is the predisposition to conduct one's life in line with moral principles, gives rise to religious belief. Baillie's argument is a putative interpretation of religion per se and in this respect it fails, for moral seriousness in itself is no guarantee of religious belief in that there are clearly individuals who consistently seek to act morally and yet who lack religious, not to say, Christian beliefs. This situation can be explained in at least two ways. Firstly, because many people inculcate basic moral beliefs such as 'it is good to be truthful' in childhood, given stable sociological and personal circumstances, it is probable that such people may find their basic moral beliefs self-sustaining and in no need of the kind of support that a religious system might give. Secondly, it is possible for a person or group to find support for their ethical beliefs in intellectual constructs other than religion. One example of such a construct is that alluded to by Geach. Geach believes that 'the knowledge of God is [...] *not* prerequisite to our having *any* moral knowledge'[35] and he goes on to suggest one non-theistic understanding of the ground of objective moral judgements, he writes:

> We must first settle what sort of answer is relevant if a man asks 'Why shouldn't I commit adultery?'[...] One obviously relevant sort of reply to a question 'Why shouldn't I ?' is an appeal to something the questioner wants, and cannot get if he does so and so.[36]

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[35] Peter Geach, 'The Moral Law and the Law of God', in *God and the Soul*, ed. by Peter Geach (London: Routledge, 1969), pp.117-29 (p.120).

[36] Geach, p.121.

Geach here suggests a pragmatic view of morality which holds that moral judgements are objective in so far as they are seen to be the efficient means to a certain desired end. Geach's work, then, suggests that there are non-theistic ways of construing morality which would still allow for the objective nature of moral judgement. It is, in his view, perfectly possible for an individual to be both morally serious and yet non-religious, and, in part, this reflects the complexity of moral experience. It is arguable that moral experience might have a strong logical and practical relation to Christian (religious) belief if it were always transparently obvious that it is primarily shaped by moral intuitions. But, as has been suggested, moral experience involves a complex interaction between the intuitive and the discursive. This complexity means that there is no one necessary account of moral experience; there are many possible, plausible accounts of moral experience.

S2.2 The Connections Between Ethical and Religious Awareness

Whilst there is no necessary connection between holding values as objective and religious belief, yet there are a number of ways in which the two are related. In the first place, if Christianity is understood as a response to the sensing of the divine in ordinary experience, as will be asserted later, then it would be reasonable to think of the intuition of moral values as one dimension of this encounter.[37] The difference between this view and that of Baillie, is that Baillie considers that, logically speaking, belief in a theistic God grows out of ethical intuition, whereas the view that is now being put holds that religious experience and belief precedes the theological interpretation of moral intuitions.

Secondly, there are a number of contingent relations between ethical experience and religious belief. It is possible, for instance, to imagine the situation in which a morally serious person, finding their basic moral beliefs challenged, might look to religious belief as a way of helping them sustain and justify their moral beliefs. Again, given a background knowledge of religious ideas, awareness of moral failure might drive a morally serious person to interpret their circumstances in religious terms. In both cases the movement from moral seriousness to religious belief would be contingent on a number of factors,

[37] Brian Davies, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: OUP, 1982), p.98.

which confirms that moral seriousness in itself does not determine belief in God. It is notable that the religious person's propensity to view ethical and religious experience as closely entwined is encouraged by the fact that some of the most decisive moments of spiritual discovery are associated with the ethical life. Thus, for instance, an experience of moral failure might be the precursor to a renewed sense of the grace of God.[38]

There are, as has been seen, certain contingent relations which may be traced between ethical and religious experience, but there is also an intrinsic relationship between religious belief and the expression of that belief in ethical and religious practice - this was one of the conclusions drawn from the discussion of John Macmurray - and it is possible to find in Baillie's idea of a Christian frame of reference confirmation of this intrinsic relation. Baillie holds, in his discussion of the Christian frame of reference, that the shape of the Christian religion is set by the paradigmatic encounter of the early Christians with God in Christ. This encounter led the early Christians to a framework of perceptual beliefs. They came to believe, in particular, that God's will was that they should live in fellowship with him and with each other. This fundamental belief was constitutive of the distinctive shape of the Christian religion as a practice characterised by kononia, and it is also the criterion by which the development of religious belief is to be governed. For, in so far as the primary belief of the Christian tradition is that God calls all people to a way of live characterised by loving fellowship, then there is a standard inherent in the tradition by which beliefs may be verified. Beliefs may be tested by asking of them: 'do these beliefs nurture Christian fellowship or not?'

The validity of the close relationship between belief and practice which Baillie sets up is borne out by Evans in his careful scrutiny of the biblical understanding of 'knowledge'. Evan's argues that the concept of 'knowledge' in the Bible is a self-involving one. By this he means that the biblical understanding of 'knowing God' has three dimensions. In the Bible to know God means, in the first place, to grasp certain propositions of the form God is P. In themselves beliefs of this sort are inert in

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[38] H. D. Lewis, 'The Voice of Conscience and the Voice of God', in *Christian Ethics and Contemporary Philosophy*, ed. by Ian T. Ramsey (London: SCM, 1966), pp.172-180 (p.177).

the sense that they do not involve the believer in any form of commitment beyond the cognitive one. But the biblical writers also understand knowledge of God to involve 'acknowledgement'. Typically the biblical God reveals himself in actions of one sort or another which express his authority and his glory. To acknowledge God is to show an attitude of respect towards the God who reveals himself, and to be disposed to offer practical obedience and loyalty to this God. Finally, the biblical writers understand a personal relation to God as the most complete form of human knowledge of God.[39] In the Old Testament this is presented as the contingent ideal of human knowledge of God; it is assumed that acknowledgement is the typical form of human knowledge of the divine. One distinctive feature of the New Testament is the claim that the ground of all knowledge of God is found in personal encounter with him, and that acknowledgement of God is the human response to the God who, by an act of free Grace, is present and perceived within human experience.

Evans demonstrates the validity of Baillie's practical interpretation of Christian belief. What Evan's shows is that belief is self-involving in that it commits the believer to certain ways of responding to God, namely to worship and obedience.

S2.3 Moral and Religious Awareness Distinct

Whilst there are important interconnections between religious and ethical awareness, yet the fact that moral experience is not necessarily related to religious belief suggests that the two forms of experience require to be distinguished more sharply than Baillie allows. Indeed one of the most powerful criticisms offered of Baillie is that he tends to collapse Christian belief and moral practice into one another. Lewis, in discussing Baillie's comment that L.P. Jack's shoemaker 'spent his breath proving that God did not exist, but spent his life proving that He did', comments:

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[39] Donald D. Evans, *The Logic of Self-Involvement* (London: SCM, 1963), pp.197-201.

> The point seems to be that no matter what the shoemaker sincerely professed, his fine conduct amounted to religious belief. That is, I think, how this cryptic remark is to be taken in its context, and if I am right we have at any rate come dangerously near the attenuation of faith which equates it with merely moral beliefs and attitudes.[40]

Reasons have already been given for maintaining the distinction between Christian belief and moral seriousness. From the point of view of the moral atheist or agnostic it is a matter of allowing for their integrity. From the side of the Christian Church, keeping open the distinction between belief and moral seriousness is the only way of accounting for the fact that there are many believers who do not act with great moral seriousness. From weakness of will or lack of concern with the moral dimensions of Christianity, a believer may show scant regard for Christian norms of conduct.[41] This instance brings to a focus the question that is being discussed here. If we cannot clearly distinguish between Christian belief and moral attitude then the morally lax Christian is no Christian at all. It would be an intolerable conclusion that a person who professes belief in the Christian God is to be denied the title of believer!

None of what has been said should be taken to minimise the importance of moral conduct for the Christian, for Christian belief without an ethical and liturgical expression is, to borrow a phrase, an impossible possibility. But, whilst belief and practice have an intrinsic relation, yet they cannot be conflated for they are logically distinct from each other, Lewis states:

> The cause of true understanding is in fact never served by blurring important distinctions, and there are few more important distinctions in religion than that between belief and practice. It is by properly noting the distinction between these that we can also arrive at a sound understanding of the relation between them and of their place in a rounded Christian conception of salvation.[42]

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[40] Lewis, pp.173-174.

[41] Lewis, p.174.

[42] Lewis, p.175.

S3 Religious Belief and the Sense of the Divine

It has been suggested that it is plausible for Baillie to hold to moral intuitionism, but that there is no logically necessary connection between ethical and religious awareness. Since it seems unlikely that Christianity can be accounted for in terms of ethical intuition, we must attempt to account for religious belief in terms of some other dimension of common experience which would give rise to Christian theism. A consideration of Baillie's work in the light of the criticisms made in section two, leads naturally to the thesis that Christian belief arises from the direct encounter with the sense of the presence of God in ordinary experience, and this is a thesis which sits well with the argument developed in Chapter Three.

It will become clear in the following pages that John Baillie's work greatly assists the articulation of the thesis which is being developed. Moreover, it will also be shown that the thesis has much to commend it: theological grounding, explanatory power and the capacity to overcome a strong contemporary objection to it. Not least, the thesis gains some credibility from the defence of moral intuitionism in section one, for in that it is plausible that a non-material moral reality is intuited, it may be reasonable also to envisage the intuition of a non-material divine reality. But, before coming to a consideration of the strengths of this thesis, it is necessary to discuss Baillie's own objection to what he calls theological intuitionism. In so far as Baillie consistently taught that human knowledge of God is mediated by the ethical, he also rejected the view that religious knowledge arises from an direct awareness of the divine. Baillie's most explicit rejection of theological intuitionism is found in *The Interpretation of Religion*.[43] Here, Baillie takes up the work of Ernst Troeltsch and Rudolf Otto as representative of theological intuitionism. According to Baillie, both writers postulate the existence of a specific religious a priori which stands alongside the moral and theoretical ones. Otto is the writer who offers the most specific definition of the religious a priori, it is ' "an eerie sensation of being in the presence of something at once

[43] IR, pp.235-255.

mysterious, aweful, and fascinating" '.[44] Both Otto and Troeltsch are committed to the severing of the 'constitutive connection' between the ethical and religious, and this means that the religious consciousness is logically independent of the ethical.

Baillie's critique of Troeltsch and Otto involves, in large part, summoning up the authority of Kant against theological intuitionism. Against Troeltsch, Baillie contends that the writer is wrong to claim Kant's backing for his position for:

> The cardinal contention in the interest of which the whole labour of the Critical Philosophy was undertaken by Kant was the contention that natural science does not really exhaust our verifiable knowledge of reality, because in our knowledge of good and evil we have available to us another and equally indisputable revelation of truth. And there is neither value nor avail in Troeltsch's assertion that there is still a third door open to us by which we may independently approach reality, until and unless he offers a like demonstration.[45]

According to Baillie, Kant's argument is that one can deduce certain a priori categories within the ethical sphere, and that these categories are self-evident in the sense that their contradiction cannot be rationally conceived.[46] Baillie contrasts the self-evident nature of the first principles of ethics with the contingent character of all religious beliefs, and he suggests that this distinction is the evidence which supports the view that there are no specifically religious a prioris.

Baillie's critique of Otto travels along similar paths to that of Troeltsch. After making some criticisms of the putative incoherence of aspects of Otto's thought, Baillie comments:

> Our real difficulty with Professor Otto's theory of religion [...] lies in the view, which he shares with Troeltsch, that the deepest and most characteristic element in religion is in its own nature quite unethical.[47]

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[44] IR, p.251.

[45] IR, p.243.

[46] IR, p.245.

[47] IR, p.252.

Baillie argues that Otto struggles to hold together the religious and the ethical and that this struggle is epitomised in the:

> Very baffling conception of a composite category, made up of a rational and a non-rational element, both of which are, however, a priori in themselves and are also a priori in respect of their conjunction.[48]

In Baillie's view, the tortuous notion of a composite category arises through the attempt to allow for the independence of the religious, and yet also to stress its intimate, though not necessary relation to the ethical sphere. The difficulties arise because Otto wishes to treat religion and morality as separate entities whilst 'in our common experience [they are] almost indistinguishably fused into one'.[49]

Much of Baillie's criticism of Otto and Troeltsch arises out of their claim to be followers of Kant. Baillie argues that both stand at odds with the central thrust of Kant's work. This criticism is clearly of some interest, but it will hardly carry much weight if the work of Kant himself is held to be suspect. Underlying Baillie's criticism of Otto and Troeltsch is the presupposition of the veridicality of Kant's thesis: that religion arises out of the ethical, and that this is mirrored in the almost indistinguishable fusion of religion and morality in common experience. This presupposition has already been criticised for it has been contended that the ethical and the religious are distinct spheres of experience, and in the light of this argument Baillie's criticisms of Troeltsch and Otto fail to convince. He does not provide any weighty reasons for discounting the possibility that the religious is logically independent of the ethical.

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[48] IR, p.252.

[49] IR, p.252.

S3.1 Theological Grounds & Explanatory Power

There are biblical grounds for holding that all people have an awareness of the divine which is distinct from their training in a particular religious tradition. The assertion that all people are culpable in a religious sense assumes a universal awareness of the divine.

John Baillie puts forward the legitimate case that the Bible assumes that all people have an awareness of God; this is the reason why the Bible does not articulate proofs for the existence of God:

> For the New Testament, as for the Old, God is One who is directly known in His approach to the human soul. He is not an inference but a Presence. He is a Presence at once urgent and gracious. By all whom He seeks He is known as a Claimant; by all whom He finds, and who in Christ find Him, He is known as a Giver.[50]

Baillie's claim that all people have an awareness of God is ably supported by Paul Tillich in a discussion of Acts 17. 22-32.[51] Tillich points out that Paul in his address to the Greek crowd on Mars' hill assumes that his hearers already have some nascent knowledge of God:

> Paul's answer [to the questioning of the crowd] consists in the assertion that those who ask him the ultimate question are not unconscious of the answer: these men adore an unknown God and thus witness to their religious knowledge in spite of their religious ignorance. That knowledge is not astounding, because God is close to each one of us; it is in Him that we live and move and exist.[52]

Tillich, drawing on Paul's example, sums up one of the cardinal principles of theological endeavour thus:

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[50] OG, p.126.

[51] Paul Tillich, *The Shaking of the Foundations* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1949), pp.125-129.

[52] Tillich, p. 130.

> The first answer, then, that we must give to those who ask about such a question [the question of the meaning of the Christian faith] is that they themselves are already aware of the answer. We must show to them that neither they nor we are outside of God, that even the atheists stand in God - namely, that power out of which they live, the truth for which they grope, and the ultimate meaning of life in which they believe. It is bad theology and religious cowardice ever to think that there may be a place where we could look at God, as though He were something outside of us to be argued for or against.[53]

It may be felt that Tillich, like Baillie, goes too far when he asserts that atheists tacitly believe in God - this issue will be dealt with later - but Acts 17 does appear to give Tillich grounds for the assertion that all people are aware of God. Moreover, this assertion has an important function within the connective system of beliefs which is Christianity. The notion of human culpability before God is a crucial assumption of the doctrine of justification by grace through faith. It is because all are culpable before God that none can be justified except through grace by faith. In this sense, the doctrine of justification takes off from the assumption that all are culpable, and this is why Paul, in his letter to the Romans, discusses human culpability (Romans 1-3) before examining the doctrine of justification (Romans 3-8). But, if justification assumes culpability, then the doctrine of universal culpability assumes that all have some awareness of the divine; for how can human beings be culpable before God if they do not have at the very least a knowledge of the existence of a suprasensory realm? In the same way as it would be unjust for a judge to condemn someone for infringing a secret law, so God himself would be culpable if he condemned human beings without allowing them some knowledge of his existence. Thus, it may be argued that there is a plausible argument that some of the cardinal beliefs of the Christian faith imply a universal awareness of the divine.

S3.2 The Nature of the Awareness of the Divine

Baillie provides an important insight into the 'sense of the divine' when he suggests that it is a universal, a priori aspect of all human consciousness.

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[53] Tillich, pp. 130-131.

S3.2.1 An A Priori

According to Baillie the awareness of the divine is a priori, it does not refer primarily to discrete religious experiences. Rather, the sense of the presence of divine is associated with the feeling of being dependent part of the universe which is one integrated whole and which is itself dependent on God. The sense of the presence of the divine is therefore, that awareness of the suprasensory realm which arises in all human experience of the world.

One way in which Baillie tries to analyse the a priori awareness of the divine is to say that this awareness is analogous to the awareness which humans have of other persons. This analogy is helpful, for it suggests that the awareness of the divine is a dimension of the primary human awareness of environment; it is prior to human subjectivity, and so it cannot be a reflective inference from experience. Moreover, this analogy is useful in that it stresses that the awareness which undergirds Christian belief is of a personal being.

With regard to the existence of other minds, some philosophers such as Berkeley, Tennant and Rashdall have claimed that our knowledge of other minds is of an inferential kind.[54] In this view, humans know of the existence of other minds through a process of inference by which a move is made from the observation of other bodies like our own to the postulation, by a process of analogy, of the existence of other minds inhabiting the bodies which are observed. Baillie suggests, rightly in my view, that the inferential view of our knowledge of other minds is inadequate for various reasons. In the first place, if it is allowed for the sake of argument that there did exist a self which did not intuitively know of the existence of other minds, then it is highly unlikely that this self would come to make the inference that other minds did exist. The solitary thinking self might just as well come to believe that the other bodies which it observed were mere soulless replicas of itself.[55] Baillie suggests that the self's own sense of uniqueness might lead it to doubt that there could be any other mind, and he is surely right in this argument for it is not self-evident that a solitary self would necessarily infer the existence of another

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[54] OG, p.205.

[55] OG, p.210.

mind, and, this being the case, the fact that all humans do believe in the existence of other minds draws doubt on the view being discussed.

Again, Baillie argues that the inferential view is unsound in that it starts from the assumption of the solitary self. The inferential view assumes the perspective of the solitary self who has no knowledge of other minds. Baillie argues that this is an illegitimate starting point for self awareness is, logically speaking, subsequent to human awareness of others. At this point Baillie reflects the logic of Macmurray, in that he argues that self-awareness is a secondary moment of human development subsequent to and a dependent upon the relation of human beings to other human beings. According to Baillie, the primal human awareness of the world is that it is, in Heidegger's terms, 'a shared world', and only subsequently do we become aware of ourselves as standing over against the world as subjects. The implication of this is that our knowledge of other minds is not an secondary inference, but an a priori aspect of human awareness. Knowledge of other minds is an a priori awareness that arises in and with the perception of human bodies, it is not an inference from this perception.[56] In Baillie's view, prior knowledge of the existence of other persons enables the interpretation of human gestures, words and other bodily movements. In this sense, the intuition of the existence of others is the ground of all inferential knowledge of other persons. In knowing others the intuitive and the discursive intermingle.[57]

Baillie's view is that the sense of the presence of the divine is analogous to the knowledge of other minds, and this is the case because knowledge of God is a form of interpersonal knowledge. Like knowledge of other people, knowledge of God is given as an a priori aspect of all human consciousness, it is not an inference or deduction from human experience or the biblical text. As with human beings, God's existence does not require to be proved for it is assumed in all human awareness; for just as human self-awareness arises from the a priori awareness of other minds, so the a priori awareness of other minds arises from the logically prior awareness of the divine personality.

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[56] OG, p.214.

[57] OG, p.213.

On the whole, Baillie's argument that the awareness of the divine is analogous to the awareness of other minds may be accepted, though with certain qualifications. In the first place, whilst the awareness of the divine may be a priori, yet it does not bear the same kind of certitude which attaches to the knowledge of other minds. This is borne out in the fact that no one in actuality questions the existence of other minds, whilst obviously the existence of God is questioned. Secondly, it has been argued in Chapter Three that concepts such as 'person' arise in the first place in ordinary contexts and are then applied to religious discourse. This conclusion clashes with Baillie's assertion that the a priori awareness of God is prior to and the basis of the knowledge of other human minds. As against Baillie's view, it can be argued that there is an awareness of an infinite other who is similar to ourselves, in that he is apprehended as an active presence with which we can interact, and that the language of the 'personal' is found to be the most appropriate mode of talking of this presence.

S3.2.2 A Universal Awareness of and Belief in God

Baillie's claim is not only that all people have a universal awareness of God, but that all people believe in God. That is, Baillie holds that all people are aware of divine demands being made upon them, and he also argues that all people believe in the veridical and justified nature of these demands, so that it might be said that they believe in God. The evidence that Baillie does indeed hold that all in some way believe in God is twofold. In the first place, there is his advocacy of the view that there are, to use Rahner's term, anonymous Christians; Baillie holds that even atheists may, in practice, be Christians. Again, Baillie holds that even those who openly reject religious belief and deny God's claims on their lives in a practical way are yet unable to escape the haunting presence of God. In other words, even practical atheists tacitly believe in the veracity and justified nature of demands which they intuit, though they turn their backs upon the demands of God.

There is good reason to have deep misgivings about Baillie's claim that all have a belief in God and his demands. It is true that a person may have a belief without knowing of it. It is common for a person to

believe something without being aware that they believe that thing. This is not to say that the belief is not conscious for, as Baillie points out, all belief qua belief is conscious. Rather, the scenario that is being considered is the common one in which a person has come to a belief, perhaps through the pressure of practical experience or through socialisation, without ever being focally aware that they have this particular belief. A belief may remain tacit just so long as the person who holds it is not required to defend that belief or contemplate that belief. But, may a person tacitly believe something and yet focally deny this belief? This, according to Baillie, is a common situation. Moral atheists deny what they, in fact, believe. This view cannot be sustained. In the first place, it involves the infringement of the integrity of the atheist. Baillie's claim is that he understands the beliefs of the atheist better than they do themselves.[58] Moreover, not only does the claim that all people have a religious belief infringe on the integrity of the unbeliever, it also removes the ground for fruitful dialogue between believers and unbelievers. There is no ground for real discussion when one group, from the outset, denies the possibility of the views of the other group in the dialogue.

There is a further and more fundamental problem with Baillie's universality thesis for, as Donald Mackinnon has commented, 'the fact remains that faith cannot somehow swallow up the philosopher's atheism; the latter has to be acknowledged as something which has its own laws, even its own dignity'.[59] Part of what Mackinnon is saying here is that arguments like Baillie's tend to blur the conceptual distinctions which there are between belief and unbelief. This blurring of distinctions reflects a misunderstanding of the nature of the concept of belief itself. Belief is a disposition to affirm certain propositions under certain circumstances. Further, belief may be regarded as a disposition to act and feel in terms of the propositions which are affirmed. Thus, a belief may be a disposition to affirm, act and feel in a certain way under certain conditions. Nevertheless, it may be asserted that the necessary element of any belief is the disposition to affirm certain propositions. It is only if one holds that 'belief' is essentially concerned with propositions, that one can make sense of the diverse ways in which 'belief' can be used. 'Belief' may be used to describe one's assent to the existence of black holes (a belief which

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[58] John Macquarrie, *In Search of Deity* (London: SCM, 1984), p.44.

[59] Donald Mackinnon, *Borderlands of Theology and Other Essays* (London: Lutterworth, 1968), p.65.

will probably have little consequence for the way one lives one's life, especially if one is not a astronomer), and 'belief' may be used of one's assent to the existence of other minds (a basic belief which has untold practical consequences). The element which is common to these two ways of applying 'belief' is that both include the affirmation of propositions. It is true that the affirmations involved in a belief may be tacit - if the circumstances have not arisen in which the explicit statement of these affirmations has not been required. Thus, a person may believe in the providence of God, but, living all their life in a close religious community, they have no reason to express this belief openly. They may in fact be unaware that they believe in the providence of God, though they have been acting and feeling in terms of this belief for years. But, if there were no circumstances in which a person, however inadequately, would affirm God's providential rule then it would be conceptually wrong to say that that person believed in providence. The concept of belief as ordinarily used suggests some willingness to affirm certain propositions. All this means that it is invalid to claim that an atheist believes in God, for self-evidently there are no circumstances under which an atheist would affirm belief in God.

If the idea of universal religious belief is questionable, it remains to ask whether it may be acceptable to argue that, whilst all people do not have a religious belief, all people have an awareness of the divine? The nub of the issue here is whether it is possible to be aware of something, in this case the divine, without consciously recognising that one is aware of that entity. I shall hold that this is a plausible view.

Michael Polanyi's distinction between tacit and focal knowledge is not much help in articulating how one can be unaware of what one is aware of, for tacit awareness, such as a joiner's awareness of his tools and the wood which he is working with, is in principle a form of awareness which might easily become part of one's focal awareness. Whilst, if the idea of a universal awareness of the divine is to be plausible, it must be argued that it is possible for atheists to have an awareness of the divine which cannot easily become part of their focal awareness and knowledge.

A more helpful way of conceiving the possibility of failing to recognise what one is aware of is in terms of visual perception. If a person was gazing out of a window at the Clarendon Building in Oxford, and if the window through which they were looking was grimy with dirt, then the person's view might so obscured that they might quite fail to recognise the Clarendon Building. Indeed, they might think that they were looking at something else completely, a bus garage or the Town Hall. Again, a person might be looking at the Clarendon Building through a well polished window, but if their vision was severely impaired then they would, ceteris paribus, be unable to discriminate what they were looking at.

It is then possible in ordinary visual perception to have an indeterminate awareness of particular entities. If the putative sense of the divine is understood with reference to this not uncommon situation, it may be argued that people can be unaware of the divine because the presence of the divine has been obscured in some way. Moreover, the analogy of visual perception suggests a reason why the awareness of the divine may sometimes be indeterminate. It may be that people have an underdeveloped sensitivity to the divine presence which prevents them from discerning clearly that of which they are aware for, as Baillie notes, sensitivity to the divine is a 'finer sense' which requires cultivation if it is to operate effectively. It may be that just as one needs to learn from others how to use one's aesthetic sense, so it is by actively participating in a religious tradition that one learns how to discern the divine presence.

In this section Baillie has been criticised for advocating that all people exercise religious belief. It may be that Baillie's advocacy of the 'anonymous Christian' view arises from a tendency to think that the apprehension of God in ordinary experience is uniformly determinate and clear even if it is sometimes tacit. To the extent that this is true, Baillie tends to lose sight of his emphasis on the contextuality of our knowledge of God as reflected most clearly in his idea of the Christian frame of reference. Baillie's idea of the Christian frame of reference sits well with the argument developed in this section that whilst all may have an awareness of the divine presence, yet the degree to which that awareness is determinate may vary according to whether a person participates in the practices and has the benefit of the insights of a religious tradition.

S3.3 A Response to an Influential Critic

One influential contemporary writer whose work represents a critical challenge to the thesis being developed is Steven Katz. Katz argues that all religious experience is shaped by the ideas and expectations of the religious community within which it arises; in Katz's view, this conclusion arises both from a fundamental philosophical principle and the evidence of religious phenomena themselves.

The analysis of the mystical traditions of different religions convinces Katz that all religious experience is shaped by the religious context in which it arises. The god who is experienced, is the god whom one has learned about and whom one expects to meet.[60] This means that different religions are not simply different ways of experiencing the same thing; different religious systems generate quite different experiences, they condition their own distinct religious worlds and experiences. Underlying this view is the general philosophical principle which suggests that all experience 'is processed through, organized by and makes itself available to us in extremely complex epistemological ways'.[61] In part, this means that there is a causal connection between language and religious experience, the latter is generated by the linguistic context in which it arises. Moreover, Katz argues that both the expression of a religious experience, the perceptual belief, and the experience itself is conditioned by linguistic context. This means that whilst Katz is agnostic on the question of whether the putative divine sphere has an extra-mental reality or not, he holds that there is no immediate experiential contact with the divine.[62]

Katz attempts to substantiate his thesis by pointing to the diversity of ways in which people from different religious traditions describe their religious experiences. Thus, on the one hand, in the Jewish mystical tradition the ultimate state towards which mystics strive (devekuth) involves the self entering into an intense relationship of love with God.[63] Whilst, on the other hand, in the Buddhist mystical tradition the ultimate mystical state (nirvana) involves the negation of selfhood. That is, the Jewish

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[60] Steven T. Katz, 'Dialogue and Revelation in the Thought of Martin Buber', *RS*, 14 (1978), 57-68 (pp.61-62).

[61] Steven T. Katz, 'Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism', in *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, ed. by Steven T. Katz (London: Sheldon, 1978), pp.22-74 (p.26).

[62] Matthew C. Bagger, 'Critical Note: Ecumenism and Perennialism', *RS*, 27 (1991), 399-411.

[63] Katz, 'Language', pp.35-39.

tradition involves religious experiences in which the self and God are discrete entities; the Buddhist tradition tends to religious experiences in which the self has no discrete identity. Katz argues that in the light of such radical disparities in the way in which the divine is experienced, it is reasonable to conclude that religious experience does not arise from a single datum, the philosophia perennis, but is conditioned by the beliefs and concepts of the traditions within which it arises.

Katz's view that religious belief determines religious experience is a considerable but not insurmountable challenge to the view that Christianity arises from a universal awareness of the divine presence. There are at least two points at which Katz can be effectively challenged. In the first place, Katz's view that that there is a causal relationship between a religious culture and religious experience is inconsistent with the way in which religious experiences may, and often do, challenge the religious beliefs of the person who is the recipient of the experience.[64] It is often the case that a religious experience brings the recipient up short, teaching them something quite unexpected, leading them on to fresh spiritual insight - the Damascus Road experience of Paul is a case in point here. Prima facie, the case of Paul bears out Alston's contention that a religious encounter with the divine may play an epistemologically incremental role in faith in that it can be the source of primary revelation and the means of individuating religious beliefs.[65] The formative role of religious experience means that Katz's perspective on the relation of belief and experience is problematic.

Secondly, Katz holds: (a) the absence of a universal language about the divine suggests that there is no one experience underlying all religions; (b) the absence of universal ways of speaking of the divine leads to the view that religious experience is shaped by religious belief. But, it is possible to agree with (a) whilst not necessarily agreeing with (b), for one may argue that different religions or groups of religions arise in response to distinct but complementary aspects of the 'Supreme Spiritual Reality' as it is disclosed in ordinary experience. That is, if one allows that there is a 'Supreme Reality which wills all to

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[64] Robert K. C. Forman, 'Introduction', in *The Problem of Pure Consciousness*, ed. by Robert K. C. Forman (New York: OUP, 1990), pp.3-49.

[65] William P. Alston, *Perceiving God*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 206-207; also Leon Schlamm, 'Numinous Experience and Religious Language', *RS*, 28 (1992), 533-531 (pp.543-544).

be consciously related to it', but that it is impossible to describe this reality fully in conceptual terms, it may be plausible to hold that different religious traditions arise and develop in response to different aspects of one reality, Ward writes:

> It seems that in almost every respect the Semitic and Indian [religious] traditions are complementary, emphasizing the active and unchanging poles respectively of the Supreme Spiritual Reality to which they both seek to relate.[66]

This approach would account for the diversity which Katz notes, and is also consistent with the suggestion of Ninian Smart that religions can be divided between those which stress personal categories and those which do not.[67] Thus, one may concede there is no one experience of the divine underlying all religion, without giving up the perception that religions in general are a response to a supreme reality which is encountered in ordinary experience, and that Christianity, certainly but perhaps not exclusively, arises in response to an awareness of a divine presence that is in some respects best described in personal terms.

Conclusion

It has been shown that Baillie's moral intuitionism is a sustainable position. Amongst the arguments put forward in support of intuitionism were the argument from introspection, the evidence of the Christian tradition, ordinary usage and the consistency of intuitionism with the phenomenology of moral experience. The latter argument offers perhaps the strongest support to Baillie's case. Moreover, the fact that intuitionism can withstand some stern critics strengthens the case for it, though it has been

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[66] Keith Ward, *Religion and Revelation*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), p.331.

[67] This distinction corresponds to Ward's distinction between the 'active' and the 'unchanging' poles of the supreme reality. Religions stressing personal categories may be related to the active pole and religions stressing non-personal categories may be related to the 'unchanging' pole of the supreme reality.

argued that Strawson identifies a weak point in the intuitionist case which, though not decisive, requires attention. To be wholly convincing the intuitionist case requires the articulation of how moral properties interact with the natural properties of a situation, and how the moral properties of a situation bring about the awareness of moral values.

Whilst intuitionism is plausible, Baillie's argument that religion arises out of ethical awareness has been found to be problematic. There is no logically necessary link between ethical awareness and religious belief, for people do hold ethical beliefs without backing them up with religious beliefs. Some people appear not to need general intellectual support for their ethical beliefs, whilst others find such support in accounts of morality such as those discussed by Geach. Thus, moral and religious awareness are distinct, and it is a difficulty in Baillie's work that he tends to conflate these two forms of experience. This being said, there are close connections between religious belief and ethical belief: ethical intuitions can be interpreted as one dimension of the encounter with God; ethical belief can often play an important role in bringing a person to faith and deepening their faith; Christian belief and ethical belief and practice are intrinsically linked in that a fundamental belief of the Christian faith is that Christians are called to a distinctive form of practice (both ethical and religious), and this is borne out by Evans' study of the concept of knowledge as understood by the Bible.

As an alternative to Baillie's account of Christian belief, it has been argued that it may be plausible to hold that religious belief arises in response to a direct encounter with the divine presence in ordinary experience. Moreover, there are resources in Baillie's work which help in the articulation and sustaining of such a thesis. The case for the thesis is supported theologically by the teaching of the Bible, and by the necessity for such a thesis if the doctrine of justification by grace through faith is to make sense. Again, the position of the thesis is strengthened by its resilience to the attack of Steven Katz. Katz's view that religious belief determines religious experience has been criticised because it does not allow for the role which religious experience plays in shaping the religious beliefs of individuals and communities. Again, Katz wrongly excludes the possibility that religious traditions may arise in response to different aspects of ordinary experience. If this is allowed, it can be argued that the

differences in religious experiences over traditions reflect the differences in the dimensions of ordinary experience with which they are concerned.

So far as the nature of the sense of the divine is concerned, it has been argued that it is a universal, a priori awareness of a being whose is, in some respects, like us, but that given certain circumstances the awareness of the divine may be indeterminate, so that whilst all have this awareness all are not equally able to determine the nature of that of which they are aware.

Chapter 6

John Oman and the Perception of the Supernatural

According to John Oman, religious knowledge - which is knowledge of the supernatural sphere - is an integral aspect of all ordinary human experience, and veridical religious belief arises from the attempt to appropriate with sensitivity and honesty the supernatural as it is disclosed in human experience.

S1 The Disclosure of the Supernatural

S1.1 The Experience of the Environment as both Natural and Supernatural

According to John Oman, in ordinary experience there is an awareness of a supernatural sphere. For Oman, the 'supernatural' does not refer to a miraculous event or a series of such events which, by their nature, are distinct from ordinary human experience, but to an integral aspect of experience.[1] The 'supernatural', for Oman, is the realm of absolute value, it 'means the world which manifests more than natural values, the world which has values which stir the sense of the holy and demand to be esteemed as sacred'.[2] Oman recognises that the supernatural is known in diverse ways:

> To one it is an almost material force; to another a purely spiritual influence. To one it is indivisible unity; to another it is gods many and lords many. To one it is the most personal of all that is conceivable and the source and goal of all freedom; to another it is a fixed cosmic process of which the individual is merely the vehicle, and freedom is only compulsion from within and not from without.[3]

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[1] Douglas Clyde Macintosh, *The Problem of Religious Knowledge* (New York: Harper, 1940), pp.183-184.

[2] NS, p.71; Sphere, p.297.

[3] NS, p.70.

The protean character of the 'supernatural' might lead some to deny its reality, but for Oman the diversity of ways in which the supernatural is described does not undermine the plausibility of the belief in such a sphere. The supernatural is of such a nature that one would expect that there would a great diversity of ways in which it might be imaged. Moreover, since all environment is known interpretatively then one would expect that human knowledge would be marked by diversity and not uniformity.

Oman argues that the human environment includes two distinct spheres, the natural and the supernatural: the seen, that which is present actuality and the unseen, that which is ideal possibility.[4] This being said, Oman is careful to affirm that the two spheres are in practice closely interrelated:

> We cannot distinguish the Natural as the mechanical and the Supernatural as the free, for we do not know how much freedom there is in the Natural or how much law in the Supernatural; nor can it be divided as between the ordinary and the miraculous, for the Natural is sometimes the more miraculous, and the Supernatural the common stuff of our daily experience. The two are not in opposition, but are so constantly interwoven that nothing may be wholly natural or wholly supernatural. Yet our interests in them are different and very definitely distinguish two aspects of our experience. Part of what we experience is natural, in the sense that its values are comparative and to be judged as they serve our needs; and part of it is supernatural, in the sense that its values are absolute, to which our needs must submit.[5]

S1.2 Arguments for the Supernatural

Oman mobilises two arguments in defence of his proposition that a supernatural realm is disclosed in ordinary experience. Firstly, Oman suggests that the most obvious evidence of the existence of a supernatural realm is the tendency to predicate intrinsic value to entities, activities and states. Oman's argument is that whenever beauty, truth and goodness are predicated of present states, states in the present are being judged in relation to the felt, intuitive awareness of the ideal realm, 'for higher values

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[4] See G.E. Moore, *Principia Ethica*, rev. edn, (Cambridge: CUP, 1993), pp.92-93. Moore elucidates an understanding of 'nature' which is consistent with Oman's work. For Moore, 'nature' refers to 'all that has existed, does exist, or will exist in time'.

[5] NS, p.72

of the Natural already manifest the ideal'.[6] To say a picture is beautiful, is to judge that the picture is some approximation to the ideal of perfect beauty. Moreover, the logic of 'finer perception' is that in all predication of goodness, beauty and truth to present states there is an aspiration to a more complete realisation of the ideal in the present. In this sense, any predication of intrinsic value to what presently exists carries within it the impetus to the further realisation of ideal values in human life.

Secondly, Oman tries to sustain the assertion of the existence of a supernatural realm with reference to the assumed rationality of the world.[7] Oman's argument is that human knowledge of the world and the capacity to act rationally, both involve the assumption of the orderliness of the world. That is, in so far as humans look for knowledge of what is true, good and beautiful and seek to act in terms of their discoveries then they assume that there is an underlying intellectual, moral and aesthetic orderliness to the world which may be discovered. Thus, all human knowledge and action presupposes the existence of an ideal realm which is the ground of the world, and which calls human beings forward in their quest for knowledge and adequate ways of responding to their environment.

S1.3 The Epistemological Form in which Knowledge of the Supernatural is given.

Though Oman gives some arguments for holding that the supernatural is disclosed in human experience, yet his deepest inclination is to assert that it is simply irrational to deny what human beings know. According to Oman, humans know a great deal about their environment in the normal course of life - such as that the supernatural exists - and this implies that the attempt to construct an epistemological account of human knowledge of the supernatural must be a posteriori. Oman rejects the approach which attempts to suspend belief until the epistemological question is resolved. In everyday experience people have a great deal of veridical knowledge, and epistemologists should not ignore this, indeed, their task is to describe the range of knowledge which people claim, to infer the epistemological forms within

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[6] NS, p.205; 206.

[7] NS, p.205.

which this knowledge arises, and on this basis to establish criteria by which to differentiate between veridical and non-veridical knowledge.[8]

Oman's contention that in epistemological work any inquiry must begin with the presupposition that much putative knowledge is veridical is surely a justified one. Oman's presupposition may be sustained, positively, by the 'principle of credulity' which suggests that when a person claims that X has appeared to them then, ceteris paribus, in all probability X has appeared to them.[9] Oman's presupposition may also be sustained, negatively, by considering the degree to which alternative approaches impoverish human knowledge of the world. Oman himself discusses the impact of Cartesianism and Classical Empiricism on the way in which the human environment is perceived. He concludes that both unnecessarily limit the range of human knowledge, and, in particular, they undermine confidence in human knowledge of the supernatural.[10]

S1.3.1 The Epistemological Problem

Oman claims, rightly I think, that the problem faced in the analysis of the epistemological form of knowledge of the supernatural is one which is common to all epistemological analyses, 'On the one hand, [he writes] there is no knowledge which is not our knowing [...] on the other, there is no knowledge except it is of an object existing apart from our knowing and in its own right'.[11] The problem facing the epistemologist is that all knowledge involves a duality: it is irreducibly the possession and creation of individual human minds, and yet it also claims to be a representation of a state of affairs which pertains irrespective of whether it is known or not.[12]

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[8] NS, p.149.

[9] Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, pp.254-276.

[10] NS, pp.168-169.

[11] NS, p.151.

[12] NS, p.110.

The problem of knowledge arises from the fact that knowledge is 'a mental construction', which is to say that all knowledge is an active effort by the knower to interpret or give a 'meaning' to his environment. Knowledge is not an unproblematic recording of what is found in the environment ('a mental copy'), it is outcome of the activity of the knower who seeks to grasp the meaning of the environment. But, if knowledge is a mental construction how can it also be knowledge of the not-self? The tension here arises from the insight that:

> All sense of reality in our perception depends on the belief that this is directed by the order of reality which determines directly the context in which we receive sensations and indirectly the forms in which we arrange them.[13]

How then can knowledge be both a mental construction and, at the same time, 'directed' by the not-self? This epistemic problem has been one of the chief concerns of philosophy since Descartes, and Oman is critical of the attempts of Classical Idealism and Classical Empiricism to resolve this problem. Both, in Oman's view, have attempted to resolve the problem by simplifying it and they have done this by overemphasis on one side of the conundrum or another. In the case of the empiricists there has been the tendency to emphasise the givenness of knowledge; idealists have tended to emphasise that knowledge is the achievement of the human mind.

S1.3.2 A Question of Meaning

According to Oman, there are pronounced epistemic similarities between the cognition of the natural and of the supernatural:

> We know all environment, not as impact or physical influx, but as meaning: and this meaning depends on (1) the unique character of the feeling it creates; (2) the unique value it has for us; (3) the immediate conviction of a special kind of objective reality, which is inseparable from this valuation; and (4) the necessity of thinking it in relation to the rest of experience and the rest of experience in relation to it.[14]

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[13] NS, p.153.

[14] NS, p.58.

Oman argues that all experiential knowledge of the supernatural and the natural, takes the form of a 'meaning' which is given to that which is known. There are, it may be argued, two emphases which Oman wants to make by his use of 'meaning'. Firstly, it is important to note that Oman juxtapositions 'meaning' with 'influx'. In Oman's view, the phrase 'physical influx' represents the view that humans acquire knowledge in the context of a causal relationship with the not-self in which they play a merely passive role. Set against this view, Oman's designation of knowledge as 'meaning' suggests that humans are active in cognition. It is not the case that human cognition is analogous to the mirror which passively reflects that to which it is directed.[15] Rather, human cognition involves a 'continuous active interpretation' of the human environment with the intention of constructing a mental picture of what is there.[16] That this is part of what Oman intends by his use of 'meaning' is confirmed by John Hick, who argues that Oman's point is that all knowledge of environment 'contains an unavoidable element of personal interpretation'.[17] Secondly, in using 'meaning' Oman is drawing attention to the putative fact that all knowledge contains an evaluative element. An integral part of all attempts to actively interpret the environment, says Oman, is the propensity to evaluate the personal significance of that which is being interpreted.[18]

In Oman's view the meaning which is given to the environment arises out of the four ways in which human beings relate to their environment. Humans relate to their environment through an immediate felt awareness of that environment; through valuing the felt awareness in a certain way; through being psychologically committed to the reality of the environment which is disclosed in feeling; and through reflecting upon that which is known immediately in feeling. All knowledge of an environment is generated through the interaction of the four ways in which humans relate to the natural and the supernatural.

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[15] NS, p.110.

[16] NS, pp.210; 110.

[17] Hick, *Faith and Knowledge*, p.121.

[18] Hick, p.121.

S1.3.3 The Role of Feeling

In so far as all knowledge is given as meaning, it is important to Oman that he should analyse how the meanings which are applied to the environment arise. According to Oman, the meaning which is applied to an environment is dependent, firstly, on the 'unique character of the feeling it creates'. Oman's use of 'feeling' requires some clarification.

In his understanding of feeling Oman is indebted to Schleiermacher. In commenting on Schleiermacher, Oman writes:

> In spite of all criticism, nothing has been done to challenge his general conception that religion is an experience of a reality which is known to us, as other reality is, by the intercourse of feeling as intuition.[19]
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> Feeling [for Schleiermacher] is neither sensation nor emotion [merely subjective sentiment], but the contact with reality, which, while it precedes clear intuition, is not a mere cause of it but passes into it. Thus religion and perception are both contacts with reality and united at their source.[20]

These quotations show that Oman substantially agrees with Schleiermacher's use of feeling, and it is in the light of this agreement that we can clarify Oman's own use of the concept. Following Schleiermacher, Oman understands feeling as our most basic response to the environment. Feeling is the human response which arises from a direct, unmediated relation to the environment.[21] Feeling stands for a relation and response to the environment which is prior to and independent of concepts and ideas, though feeling does have a cognitive aspect for it is a felt sense of the self and the human environment. Oman argues that all perception of environment (clear intuition) is rooted in the primitive awareness of the environment, and that all knowledge gathering is the attempt to explore the environment which is already known through feeling. One implication of this view is that he holds that there are different modes of feeling corresponding to the different dimensions of the human environment, the natural and the supernatural. Oman speaks of the 'direct sense or feeling of the holy' which must be distinguished

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[19] John Oman, 'Schleiermacher', *JTS*, 30 (1928-1929), 401-405 (p.404).

[20] 'Schleiermacher', p.404.

[21] NS, p.59.

from the felt awareness of the material world. The supernatural is known through the sense of the holy, the material is known through the feelings associated with sensation.[22] Moreover, feeling, as used by Oman, must be distinguished from temporary states of emotion, such as anger or joy.[23] For Oman, feeling is that self-consciousness and awareness of environment which is a continuous aspect of human consciousness.[24]

The feeling of the holy is the given aspect in human knowledge of the supernatural, and this means that cognition of the supernatural is grounded in an immediate relation to the supernatural.[25] According to Oman, the most primitive form of the feeling of the holy does not involve a feeling of the good, the true and the beautiful, he writes:

> In every Western European language, as well as our own, the term 'holy' used by itself would be understood to mean what stirs moral reverence. But this is not its original meaning. In the oldest parts even of the Old Testament, it is used for what stirs a mysterious dread, a 'holy God' not meaning a God "of purer eyes than to behold iniquity", but one apart and awe-inspiring. The more religions are primitive, the more the holy has to do with awe, and the less with moral reverence.[26]

Oman concedes that as a religion develops, the feeling of the holy takes on a moral aspect which reflects the 'moral nature of the [supernatural] environment'.[27] Indeed, the ethical is said to be always nascent in the sense of the holy.[28] In its primitive state, however, the sense of the holy is to do with the feeling of awe.[29] 'In all religion [writes Oman] it [the sense of the numinous] is perhaps a general basis, as the

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[22] HR, p.XI.

[23] The question of the relation of feeling to emotion is one which is problematic in modern philosophy. See William Alston, 'Emotion and Feeling', in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. by Paul Edwards, 8 vols (London: Collier and Macmillan, 1967), II, pp.479-485.

[24] Wayne Proudfoot, *Religious Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), p.116.

[25] Macintosh, p.96.

[26] NS, p.59.

[27] Oman talks of the evolution of the sense of the holy from 'awesome holy' to 'ethical holy'. There is said to be an extended period between the two which led, in due course, to the perception of the absolute value of the good, the true and the beautiful. See Healey, *Religion and Reality*, p.65; Sphere, p.295.

[28] NS, p.95.

[29] NS, p.64.

world of touch is to the other senses'.[30] According to Oman, the feeling of the holy is a mysterious dread which arises in response to that which is apart and awe-inspiring. Oman accepts Rudolph Otto's analysis of the 'mysterious dread' into the feeling of fear and fascination,[31] though he is critical of what he sees as Otto's overemphasis on the sense of the holy as 'intense emotion'.[32] Oman's criticism of Otto here focuses on the degree to which Otto, in his view, tends to interpret the sense of the holy as though it is a passing emotion of which one is intensely aware. For Oman, the feeling of the holy is a continuous mode of awareness analogous to the ordinary senses. Just as when one looks at something one is unaware of the sense of sight, so when the supernatural is being perceived the feeling of the holy is not at the front of one's mind, it operates subconsciously.

There is also another dimension, and this is the element of challenge involved in the feeling of the holy. Oman's assertion is that the feeling of awe is the 'nerve and sinew' of the desire to explore the supernatural environment. The sense of awe arises from the feeling of the greatness of that which is encountered, the numinous, and this feeling is that which constitutes the challenge to explore the supernatural.

Thus, the sense of the numinous is one fundamental element in all religion. Religion arises out of the feeling of awe to that which is awe-inspiring. At its most primitive level, the object of the sense of the holy is undifferentiated; the sense of the holy is associated with a sense of the unity of all environment as 'one absolute reality'.[33] In this regard Langford has commented that 'Oman is not suggesting that religious awareness is response [sic] to any special object, but rather is constituted by a special type of awareness of all objects taken as a whole'.[34]

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[30] NS, p.61.

[31] NS, p.60.

[32] HR, p.XXXIX.

[33] NS, p.64.

[34] T. A. Langford, 'The Theological Methodology of John Oman and H.H. Farmer', *RS*, 1 (1966), 229-240 (p.231).

Oman considers that the sense of the holy as undifferentiated, which is the most primitive form of the sense of the numinous, partly explains the challenge which the feeling of the holy poses.[35] The sense of the holy challenges human beings to realise in their own experience the unity which is found in the undifferentiated holy. That is, in the sense of the holy there is a feeling of the human environment as being one. The challenge which the sense of the holy poses is to think the world as one and to act in terms that knowledge.

Oman's argument that human knowledge of the supernatural is grounded in feeling is an essential aspect of his attempt to resolve the epistemological problematic. For, in that there is a direct cognitive relation to the supernatural through feeling, it follows that human attempts to interpret the meaning of the supernatural are not mere imaginative constructions with no ground in the supernatural reality itself. In the next chapter, Oman's use of feeling will come under intense critical scrutiny. The focus of the critical discussion will fall on two questions: (1) is it a plausible hypothesis that human knowledge of the supernatural is rooted in a preconceptual awareness, and, if so, can the protean concept of feeling be utilised to describe such preconceptual consciousness; (2) is it plausible to speak of feeling as both preconceptual and yet to suggest that it carries some cognitive content?

S1.3.4 Value

The second element of any act of knowing, is 'the unique value it has for us'. Oman's use of 'value' has to do with the idea of measuring the worth of an entity. Bearing in mind that Oman discusses value in the context of his analysis of knowledge, it might be said that by value Oman is referring to the act, implicit in any perception, of allocating a worth to that which one perceives. Thus, to value an entity correctly is to accord it a worth correspondent with it the objective realm of value.[36]

In seeking to clarify value Oman distinguishes it from judgements of quantity, he writes:

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[35] NS, p.65.

[36] NS, p.58.

> Possibly there is no division to which objection might not be taken, but the least objectionable is into value-judgements and theoretical-judgements, though it would be plainer, if less precise to call them judgements of quality and judgements of quantity. This latter, which is at least a general difference, is what, at all events, most concerns us, though a theoretical-judgement may only be quantitative indirectly. An example will most simply show the difference. It is a value-judgement that violet is the most beautiful of the colours; it is a theoretical-judgement that it is the highest light vibration within our power to see.[37]

The distinction between judgements of quantity and quality is instructive. According to Oman, a judgement of quantity is concerned with the analysis of the parts of an entity and the relation of these parts, and the relation of an entity to other entities with which it is in relation. One aspect of such a judgement is that it is relatively impersonal - it is theoretical. Conversely, a judgement of quality - a value judgement - is a personal assessment of the intrinsic or extrinsic worth of an entity or state of affairs as a whole.

According to Oman, the supernatural is known through a feeling of dread which is valued as the feeling of something of incomparable worth. The concomitant of this is that if a feeling of awe is associated with any other type of valuation then it is not the sense of the holy.[38] The sacred is understood as that which is valued as being incomparable.[39] Moreover, Oman holds that the sacred points to that which is not of a relative or use value, such as a human entity might be.[40] It is Oman's view that the valuation of the sacred indicates the supernatural sphere, and that the supernatural is the sphere which concerns religion:

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[37] NS, p.201.

[38] NS, p.62.

[39] NS, pp.65-66.

[40] Sphere, p.289.

> Everything that is sacred is in the sphere of religion, and everything in the sphere of religion is sacred. Unless dogmas express beliefs valued as sacred, they are mere intellectual formulas; unless rites are the worship of a power valued as sacred, they are mere social ceremonies; unless God himself embody all we value as sacred he is a mere metaphysical hypothesis. Only when the valuation as sacred accompanies the sense of awe and reverence have we the religious holy; and only a reality having this absolute value is the religious Supernatural. Therefore, if there be any one mark of the sphere of religion, it is this valuation of everything within it as sacred.[41]

Oman suggests that the relation between valuation and feeling is a dialectical one, sometimes valuation will follow feeling at other times the opposite will be true.[42] Further, he holds that as a religion develops it will increasingly be the case that feeling will follow the valuation of the sacred. This pattern of development is, moreover, not confined to knowledge of the supernatural:

> All development of mind is marked by the growing power of the rational in feeling over the merely impulsive. But a rational feeling means one dependent on and proportionate to the actual value it regards.[43]

Oman's argument is that knowledge of the supernatural develops by the application of the intellect to the evaluation of the sacred.[44] This suggestion does not, however, negate the thesis that in a logical sense the original valuation of the sacred is dependent almost wholly on feeling.[45]

S1.3.4.1 The Role of Ideal Values in Human Life

As has been said, Oman argues that the primal awareness of the sacred is of the undifferentiated holy, but human history records the progressive differentiation of the sacred, and, in this regard, it may be said that the sacred is known as the sphere which is valued as the good, the true, and the beautiful. According to Oman, human awareness of a sphere of ideal values evokes reverence, awakens a sense of obligation and is constitutive of human personality.

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[41] NS, p.69.

[42] NS, p.66.

[43] NS, p.66.

[44] Sphere, p.290.

[45] NS, p.66.

> The test of our higher values [writes Oman] is that they are sacred. This means that they belong to an environment which awakes absolute reverence and imposes absolute obligation. If we respond to the former, we start with the conviction that the universe has high mysteries still beyond us, which only our greatest effort and highest progress can ever reach after; and, if we submit to the latter, it will be clear that our inquiry is likely to be successful only as we make truth, goodness and beauty our guiding stars.[46]

Oman defines ideal values as those which evoke a sense of reverence and obligation. By reverence Oman means humility before the 'greatness of reality', and this sense of humility is engendered, in part, by an awareness of human ignorance of reality. It is in this sense that reverence is seen as a spur to inquiry, for to be profoundly aware of the greatness of reality and one's own ignorance is likely to inspire a thirst for new insight. In discussing this set of ideas Oman introduces the religious concept of mystery, he writes:

> Mystery is not nescience. It is the half-lifted veil of the sanctuary, through which all life's higher meaning shines, and which is the endless challenge to all our inquiries. The hold it has upon us is that we know it to be an open secret were we only wise enough to ask it the right questions.
>
> [...] Here perhaps is the essential attitude of faith. It is that all this mighty frame of the Natural and man as he belongs to it have their deepest significance, not in what they are, but in the promise dimly unveiled in such imperfect ideals of the true, the beautiful and the good as we are able to reach out after.[47]

Oman argues, then, that in the predication of goodness, truth and beauty humans are intuitively aware of the ideal realm of the good, the true and the beautiful. That is, when present entities or states of affairs are valued as good, true, and beautiful - what Oman calls higher natural valuation - there is always an awareness of how far short these entities and states of affairs fall of the truth, the beautiful, and the good: in present valuation there is always an felt awareness of that which ought to be: the true, the good, the beautiful.[48] It is the ideal sphere of what ought to be that is the true greatness of reality, and it is this sphere and its progressive realisation in human experience which gives the natural its 'deepest significance'.

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[46] NS, pp.212-213.

[47] NS, pp.213-214.

[48] NS, p.205.

The awareness of a sphere of ideal values not only evokes reverence it also involves obligations. In Oman's view, to recognise the absolute is to be obliged to aspire to act according to the good, to think according to the true, and to feel according to the beautiful. Moreover, these are not three distinct responses to the absolute, they are three interrelated moments of 'one attitude of one individual dealing with one reality'.[49]

The obligations which an awareness of the ideal realm lay upon a person are twofold. On the one hand, though every intrinsic valuation of a state of affairs or entity will be recognised as provisional, yet to make an intrinsic valuation lays an obligation upon a person to act, think and feel in terms of that evaluation, and this is the case because an intrinsic valuation made in good faith is the best approximation to the ideal that a person presently possesses. Since ideal values have categorical force, so current valuations of states and entities also have a derived authority.

On the other hand, every current predication of truth, beauty and goodness points beyond itself to the ideals of truth, beauty and goodness. Since the incursion of the ideal sphere in experience does not take the form of fixed judgements - for the absolute is only known intuitively as a mystery - the right response to the absolute is not the affirmation of certain fixed judgements, but a commitment to an 'attitude which faces in the direction of right verdicts'.[50]

According to Oman, ideal values in kindling reverence and a sense of obligation are constitutive of human personality. Oman's understanding of the place of ideal values in human life is premised upon his argument that human beings qua human beings are autonomous: the vital characteristic of moral

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[49] NS, p.207.

[50] NS, p.207.

personality, according to Oman, is autonomy.[51] Human autonomy, in turn, is reflected in human self-consciousness, self-direction and self-determination.

Oman defines 'self-consciousness' in the following way:

> When we say the moral person lives in the world of his own self-consciousness, more is meant than that every person is conscious of self, or even that the self is the centre of all experience. It means that the world I deal with is all of it my world, towards all of which I can be active, if only by way of approval or disapproval.[52]

Oman's meaning is that human beings act and form intentions on the basis of their personal interpretation of the world - the meaning which is assigned to the environment. As we have already seen, Oman holds that meaning is shaped by the particular significance or value which is placed on the world. Moreover, that which is held to be of significance in the world is defined by 'our interests and our activities.'[53] In turn, human interests and activities are marked out by the particular events which shape the lives of individuals, and the attempts which humans make to cope with and learn from these events. Thus, one dimension of human autonomy is that humans eke out their own personal interpretation of the world, and it is upon this basis that they form intentions and act. Oman doesn't say this, but presumably self-consciousness is a dimension of human freedom in so far as it is possible for a person to meekly accept the meaning which another places on the world. If this happens then freedom is poisoned at the root.

Self-direction is the capacity which humans have to legislate for themselves, that is, to form their own intentions. The figure of 'legislation' is an apt one, for Oman considers self-direction as involving the human capacity to judge between actions and determine which they will regard as right, on the basis of

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[51] GP, p.41.

[52] GP, p.54.

[53] GP, p.55.

their own insight. [54] Given the seriousness with which he regards self-direction, he regards heteronomy, which is 'legislation for us by others', as the essence of sin.

In the light of his argument that humans are at best self-directed, Oman views conscience not as a fixed and given set of intuitions, but as the given state of a person's moral insight at any particular time. The ground of the conscience is the person's 'consciousness of the sacred', that is to say, the intuition of the divine which draws a person to search for truth, beauty and goodness.[55] Oman regards the conscience itself as an innate capacity for judging what ought to be thought, felt and done.[56] This moral faculty can be educated but not instructed. By this, Oman means to say that human moral autonomy demands that humans aspire to grow in insight and in this sense 'all life ought to be its [conscience's] education'. But, a persons conscience is sullied if it is shaped by instruction from the insights of others, and, daringly, Oman suggests that we may not look even to God for moral rules as an alternative to our own insights. The distinction between education and instruction is, of course, a matter of degree, for all education must involve an element of instruction. The point which Oman is making is that education must aim at enabling the individual to come to their own considered view; it must not impose a given set of beliefs upon the pupil. In this sense, the aim of moral education is to enable people to establish for themselves what they ought to do, and to encourage them to follow their conscience.[57]

Oman seeks to underpin his argument against heteronomy by pointing to some of the deficiencies of allowing others to shape our conscience.[58] In the first place, allowing our consciences to be shaped by moral rules is likely to narrow the scope of our moral sensitiveness. That is, the danger of responding to one's environment in terms of a stock of set rules is that one will fail to be aware of the new challenges and insights which changing circumstances throw up. Thus, if one were to have a fixed negative view on cohabitation before marriage, it might be that one would fail to appreciate the positive challenge

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[54] GP, p.51.

[55] NS, p.313.

[56] NS, p.316.

[57] NS, p.316.

[58] GP, p.52.

which this widespread phenomenon poses to Christian ethics. Again, the danger of heteronomy is that we begin to think and act in order to please others which is the corruption of moral activity. Most importantly of all, God can only be 'known' and 'served' in so far as humans pursue moral independence.[59] Oman's argument is that independence of judgement, whilst not guaranteeing infallibility, provides the conditions for 'seeing more clearly the absolute righteousness'.[60] In that God's will is coterminous with the moral order, so independence of judgement enables trust in God.

Finally, human autonomy involves human beings having power to serve their own ends:

> Self-determination is determination by the self, by its own character, its own ends and its own motives. This, and nothing less, marks off the frontiers of the person amid the universe and makes them real.[61]

Oman regards the awareness which is associated with self-determination as 'our most direct conscious experience', and indeed it is the ground of self-consciousness.[62] By this Oman means that self-consciousness arises as the self differentiates itself from the world in action - this view clearly resonates with Macmurray's view of the issue. The extension of this argument is that self-identity over time is dependent on action, for a person's memory is primarily their memory of their doings in the world.[63] Thus, 'will [...] is one with ourselves as no other possession can be identified with its possessor'.[64] Further, given the importance of the will to selfhood 'there can be no personal relation with us except through it'.[65] On this basis, Oman distinguishes between a personal and individual relation between people. If a person lifts up an injured and unconscious man, he offers that person 'individual help'. An individual relation is defined by the relation of activity and passivity which pertains between the two

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[59] GP, p.53.

[60] GP, p.53.

[61] GP, p.47.

[62] GP, p.45.

[63] GP, p.46.

[64] GP, p.46.

[65] GP, p.46.

people who are in relation. A personal relation and, more especially, personal help is characterised by the 'giver and receiver [...] [being] [...] embraced in one fellowship'.[66] A personal relationship involves mutuality and the ability of both parties to perceive, intend and act freely. Thus, when help is offered in a personal relationship, it is offered in such a way as to bring 'forth a response from within'.[67]

Oman's understanding of human nature as to do with autonomy illuminates his view of the role of value in human knowledge and life. Oman's view is that moral personality involves the capacity of a person to be self-determined in pursuing and living in terms of the good, the true and the beautiful. This view of moral personality places the awareness of ideal values right at the heart of the human condition, for the intuition of the ideal is that which, in Oman's view, liberates human beings from the tyranny of the given for the pursuit of what ought to be. In Oman's view, ideal values are those forms of valuation which enable persons to develop self-mastery and mastery of the world in which they live. Ideal values are the means by which people can realise their natures as moral persons.[68] It is because of ideal values that human beings are more than mere animals. Animals, according to Oman, live their lives within the horizon of the given and especially death, whereas human beings, through their awareness of the ideal, transcend their animal givenness, and it is in this sense that ideal values are the conditions of all progress.[69] Thus, Oman holds the view that the awareness of the supernatural as a sphere of ideal values is constitutive of moral personality.

S1.3.5 The Conviction of Objectivity

The third way in which humans relate to environment is in 'the immediate conviction of a special kind of objective reality'. By this, Oman means that in any act of knowing there is the psychological conviction that what is known is a reality distinct from one's knowing of it. Thus, Oman claims that knowledge of the supernatural goes along with the psychological certitude that that which is disclosed in

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[66] GP, p.43.

[67] GP, p.43.

[68] Sphere, p.292.

[69] Sphere, p.292; HR, pp. 32-33.

the sense of the sacred is real. In this regard, England is critical of Oman for taking the view that subjective certitude guarantees the objective reality of the supernatural. If Oman were guilty of England's charge then he would be at fault, for there is no logical ground for moving directly from psychological certitude to the postulation of the reality of that which is putatively perceived.[70] As Richard Swinburne shows in discussing the 'principle of credulity', even the granting of prima facie justification to a perception demands the discussion of the conditions which would allow such justification.[71] Thus, England is correct to argue that the truth value of a perceptual experience and belief can only be ascertained by judging the experience and belief in terms of appropriate criteria. But Oman does, in fact, suggest that perceptual experiences and beliefs must be subjected to scrutiny. Thus, in discussing knowledge Oman avers that thinking reflectively is an integral aspect of all knowledge. Moreover, Oman's point is that the human capacity to think allows the interpretation of the not-self in terms of other knowledge, and this implies that in any perceptual experience there is, at least implicitly, a process of assessment going on. Further, Oman's view that the objectivity of an interpretation of the not-self may be assessed in terms of the responsiveness of the world to that interpretation - a view which will be discussed later - also suggests that Oman does not fall into the error which England ascribes to him.

S1.3.6 Reflective Thought

The fourth relation to environment is 'the necessity of thinking it in relation to the rest of experience and the rest of experience in relation to it'. In Oman's view, the meaning given to an environment depends, not only on the immediate feeling, valuation and psychological conviction, but also on the reflective effort by which the perception of a particular entity can be related to other perceptions. A simple example of what Oman is speaking of might be that of the student entering the Bodleian Library. The student perceives a desk and an interpretated meaning is given to that which is perceived with reference not only to the immediate feeling, psychological conviction and valuation of the entity, but also with

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[70] F.E. England, *The Validity of Religious Experience* (London: Nicholson & Larson, 1937), pp.197-199.

[71] Swinburne sets out four criteria by which we may judge whether a perception is to be regarded as having prima facie positive veridical status: the reliability of the perceiver; the circumstances within which a perception arises; background evidence regarding the likeliehood of a claimed perception; the likliehood of another more convincing explanation of that which has been perceived. See *The Existence of God*, pp.254-276.

reference to memories of past visits to the Library. In other words, in part, the meaning of the entity is determined by relating it intellectually to past perceptions. Moreover, it might be that the student had never entered a library and had never seen a desk before, yet this person is able to interpret correctly the nature of the entity by referring to previous conversations, or perhaps by associating the entity with a relevant account read in a book. These latter instances show us that thought, enabled by language, allows the determination of the meaning of a perception by relating it, not only to individual memories and present experiences, but also to the experiences of others.

The role of thought in establishing the character of what is perceived suggests that 'meaning' involves the attempt to identify the nature of that which is perceived. This is what was implied above when it was said that 'meaning' describes the attempt to interpret or understand what it is that is perceived. It is also true, however, that Oman's emphasis on valuation implies that the attempt to identify what is being perceived, is always related to the attempt to interpret environment according to its significance or worth to the perceiver.

S1.3.6.1 Theological Thinking: The Mode of Thought Appropriate to the Experience of the Supernatural

Theology, in Oman's terms, is the unique way of reflecting upon the feeling, valuation and psychological certitude of the supernatural, and the specific theological task is to think together the experience of the supernatural with all other human experiences. Theology, 'like other sciences' is 'the study of a reality already given' and its role is the critical examination of our perceptions of the supernatural.[72] Theology enables true perceptions of the supernatural by aiming to probe the character of the supernatural. In discussing theology, Oman stresses that the integrity of the discipline is dependent on it being methodologically sound and critically aware.[73] The most fundamental canon of theological method is that it aims to state the truth of what is known, and 'truth is concerned purely with the witness of any kind of reality to itself'.[74] That is, theology aims to explicate the supernatural as it gives itself to be

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[72] NS, p.72.

[73] Method, p.82.

[74] Method, p.82.

known in human experience. In this way, Oman holds that the testimony of experience is the final arbiter of theological truth. Indeed, it is the fact that the supernatural does disclose itself in human experience which makes theological inquiry meaningful and important, for:

> If God does not manifest Himself now by being an effective power in our experience, if we do not live in Him in some way as continuously and evidently as in the atmosphere, it does not much matter whether we are infidels or not.[75]

S1.3.6.2 Theology's Subject Matter

According to Oman, the subject matter of theology is distinct from the other sciences. Oman contrasts the nature of the knowledge sought in theology with that sought in the other sciences. The non-theological sciences are concerned with the study of the general properties of the natural world [76] in order to enable humans to control the future course of human and natural development.[77] Theology, in contrast, is concerned with the investigation of the teleological goal to which all is being drawn by the supernatural:

> Theology, as the study of religion ought, therefore, to be of the nature of prophecy. As its interest is the goal, it necessarily works on the frontiers of intuition and anticipation; and it asks what relation to the present reality best manifests what is beyond it. Its primary conviction is that a higher reality is seeking to reveal itself to us through our whole experience in this present world, and is calling us to participate in its life, and that, as with all fuller life, we enter in as we reach out after our furthest vision and are loyal to its highest even vaguely concerned requirements.[78]

In Oman's view, the concern of theology is with the higher reality which reveals itself in 'intuition and anticipation'. The intuition that Oman is speaking of here is a 'vaguely' felt awareness of a reality which challenges us to 'deeper insight and higher consecration'. Since theology's subject matter is that which is being progressively disclosed, then theology is prophetic. Its aim is to point to the goal of human

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[75] Method, p.86.

[76] Method, p.91.

[77] Method, p.91.

[78] Method, pp. 91-92.

history, and it is in this sense that it deals with the 'the supreme business of progress'. Theology deals with 'life and actual experience [...] as they speak to us of things beyond demonstration'.

Oman's contention is that theology must begin with human experience, and that its findings must be consistent with ordinary human experience. Thus, for instance, he refutes the idea of 'double predestination' by arguing that it is inconsistent with the way in which Christians ordinarily experience God, and, moreover, double predestination is inconsistent with God's intention in his dealing with human beings, for God is known in human experience as the one who nurtures human personality. But it is not only with experience that theology deals, but experience as it 'speaks to us of things beyond demonstration'. What is it that 'speaks to us'? Oman may mean two things here. On the one hand, he is referring to the intuitive awareness of the supernatural of which he has spoken. On the other, he may be talking of the human propensity, rooted in the intuition of the supernatural, to value entities as good, true and beautiful. In so far as humans recognise ideal values they are beckoned on to that which is of incomparable worth, the true, the good, and the beautiful. Theology's task is to point forward to the ideal, and in this sense its pronouncements cannot be as certain as those of the sciences which are concerned, in the main, with what 'is'.[79]

The nature of the truth that theology seeks defines the usefulness of the history of religious discovery and endeavour (experience) to the theologian; Oman identifies two roles which it plays. Firstly, since theology is concerned with a discussion of God as he reveals himself in human experience, then history 'as man's larger experience, must be of supreme importance for interpreting any purpose there may be in the world'.[80] That is, theologians working with Oman's experiential model would find their theology greatly impoverished if they only had their own experience to work with; the study of history greatly increases the raw data available to the theologian.[81] The assumption here is, of course, that God reveals

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[79] Method, p.90.

[80] Method, p.89.

[81] VA, p. 57.

himself in history and in experience: 'Unless God is continuously and progressively revealing Himself in His dealings with His world, He is not God in any sense which concerns religion.'[82]

Whilst the history of religious discovery has a role in theology, Oman stresses that it cannot be used as an authority. The history of religious discovery - or tradition - is a resource to fructify the perception of the theologian here and now, but it is not an authority which constrains theological conclusions.[83] Oman's view of tradition is premised on his understanding of revelation. On the basis of his understanding of moral personality, Oman suggests that God, as personal, respects the autonomy of human beings. Part of what this means is that revelation must not be understood as an infallible word given once and for all, for, as such, it would infringe the autonomy of human beings to discover truth for themselves, to legislate for themselves and to act in a self directed way. God, therefore, does not offer infallible revelations, he reveals himself to human beings as they search for him in the present. In this sense, revelation is 'the embodiment of a relation to God'.[84] Revelation is the conviction of truth which grows as the individual seeks to discover truth and live in the light of what they already count as truth. Revelation is revelation because it is God who reveals, but God reveals himself and his purposes only as individuals search for him, and God only reveals himself in a way commensurate with the knowledge of the society in which the individual is based. Thus, the role of tradition is not to impose a certain way of thinking, feeling or acting upon those living in the present; its role is to enable people to hear God's word in their present. Tradition is revelation only as it enables moral freedom and insight in the present.[85]

A second and more specific way in which the history of religious discovery serves the theologian, is by offering insight into the lives of spiritual masters who can serve as examples of how the theologian must deport themself if they are to be successful:

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[82] Method, p.89.

[83] NS, p.347.

[84] John MacLeod, 'John Oman as Theologian', *Hibbert Journal*, 48 (1950), 348-353 (p.350).

[85] MacLeod, p.349.

> Especially it [theology] draws its material, its inspiration, its guidance, from those who in the stress of greater conflict have been more faithful to the highest, and so have seen furthest. It is not a mere question of learning what they saw, as we can all be in some measure poets of nature when we read Wordsworth. The supreme thing is to learn the bearing towards life whereby men were prophets of the highest. And when we find one whose bearing was wholly right, in utter emancipation of soul from the blindness of worldly prudence and the fetters of evil desire, who with the absolute courage of faith walked ever in the unseen and eternal, theology thinks it has found its right beginning, the attitude in which it can hope to have good success, the freedom and the emancipation whereby it can interpret to man the higher realm of his possibility, which is essentially a world of freedom in larger truth and more far-reaching aspiration.[86]

For Oman, Christ exemplifies the attitude that will make for the success of the theological project. Christ in his allegiance to the supernatural was free from self-interest and the concerns of worldly prudence. Christ was entirely honest in his relation to the supernatural, for he sought out the supernatural and responded fully to his understanding of the supernatural. According to Oman, the theologian must strive for Christ-like honesty in dealing with the supernatural, this is a requirement for the discovery of theological truth. Further, Oman suggests that with Christ and all the prophets sincerity expresses itself in their being reconciled to the world. According to Oman, 'reconciliation', understood as the acceptance of 'the world as belonging to this God and his rule of love', is the key to understanding the purpose of human history.[87] Jesus had this insight and lived his life in response to this insight. The theologian works then from an attitude of sincerity and with the hermeneutical key represented by 'reconciliation', for the concept of reconciliation is that which most adequately sums up the incursion of God into human experience:

> The particular difference here [the difference which God makes in our experience] is reconciliation to what otherwise is a hostile world, and victory over its evil, and the making of all of it ours for abiding good. All the concreteness, life, interest' appeal of religion cease when we turn from this victorious faith to dialectic.[88]

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[86] Method, p.92.

[87] Macleod, p.352.

[88] Method, p.89.

S1.3.6.3 Theological Method

In discussing theological method, Oman touches on the continuities and discontinuities of theology and the other sciences. In the first place, Oman is emphatic that theology shares an empirical method with the other sciences. That is, Oman eschews the approach which would begin theological discourse with dogmatic propositions, perhaps taken from the Bible, and attempts to deduce the nature of the human environment from these propositions. Oman is dismissive of this approach for 'facts are not as we think they ought to be, but, only as they are'.[89] Moreover, though by reasoning 'from the perfect circles of their own conception rather than inquire into the ellipses of reality' theologians might generate pleasing certainties, yet these certainties are no more than the appearance of certainty.[90] Further, according to Oman, the a priori method assumes that it understands the mind of God. From a knowledge of his perfection, the a priori method assumes that there will be nothing errant or oblique in God's activity. Oman, in my view rightly, argues that such an approach shows a lack of reverence for God, for 'true reverence would lay down no rules for God' it would endeavour, rather, to discover what rules he has laid down for himself.[91]

In contrast to the a priori method, Oman is insistent that theology is an inquiry into experience as it presents itself:

> In this investigation truth is accord with what actually exists; and the only ground for being assured of this correspondence is right interpretation of the witness of this reality by the difference it makes in our experience.[92]

An aspect of the experiential method is the need for an open inquiry: 'Religion like all else that claims to deal with a real world, must submit to open investigation.'[93] By 'open investigation' Oman means that in theology no doctrines, however dear, are to be sacrosanct, only the aspiration to uncover the truth is

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[89] VA, p.93.

[90] VA, p.49.

[91] VA, p.50.

[92] Method, p.87.

[93] Method, p.86.

sacrosanct and it is only by fearless investigation that the truth can be uncovered.[94] Oman's advocacy of 'open inquiry' is the assertion that the ultimate authority in theological work is the authority of the object of theological knowledge, and that the only obligation of the theologian is to deal sincerely with that reality with which he is engaged and to allow it to shine in its own light.

S1.3.7 The Interaction of the Four Relations to the Supernatural

> In all experience these four aspects are indivisibly joined in one, and each loses its significance in isolation. The feeling depends on the value, and the value of the feeling; the conviction of reality is not an additional inference, but the valuation depends on the conviction of reality, and the conviction of reality on the correctness of the valuation; the thinking of it in its place in our whole experience is not after we have received it, but is necessary for receiving it, and essential to the conviction of its reality. These elements are the same for the experience of things physical as for the experience of things spiritual. What distinguishes religion from all else is the unique quality of the feeling, of the valuation, of the nature of the object, and of the way of thinking things together.[95]

Oman emphasises the unity of the four relations to the environment in the determination of the meaning which is applied to the environment. Nevertheless, Oman's work suggests that there is a logical if not temporal distinction to be drawn between feeling, which is a preconceptual but cognitive relation to environment, and the other ways in which humans relate to the supernatural environment. Feeling is the given element in perception, and, as such, 'it has a position of priority in all epistemological theory'.[96] The meaning of a particular feeling is picked out through thought and valuation. Thus, in perception there are elements of human passivity as well as activity. In perception, according to Oman, any environment will create a unique feeling in the perceiver, this is the passive aspect of perception. On the other hand, the way in which this feeling in interpreted in conscious experience will be determined by the activity of the perceiver. Thus, knowledge of the supernatural involves 'the coinherence of giveness and [active] reception'.[97]

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[94] Macleod (p.349) in commenting on Oman, writes: 'The real business of a theological college is being done if men come out from it knowing how to seek the truth for themselves.

[95] NS, p.58.

[96] Langford, p.230.

[97] Langford, pp.229-230

S1.3.8 The Four Moments of Knowledge of the Supernatural

Oman argues, as has been shown, that there are four ways in which human beings relate to the supernatural. He also holds that the knowledge which is yielded through the perception of the supernatural (through the operation of the four relations to the supernatural) may be analysed into four moments. In describing the four moments or types of knowledge, Oman writes:

> Four types of knowing are to be distinguished. These we may call awareness, apprehension, comprehension, explanation. Like everything unique and only known by experience of itself, they are impossible to define; and, like all that belongs to one mind, they ought not to be divided. Yet they are sufficiently unlike to be distinguished and sufficiently apart to be illustrated, if not described.[98]

Oman, here, makes two important points. The first is that the four types of knowing cannot be defined or described. Clearly this does not mean that nothing can be said about the four types of knowledge for a large section of *The Natural and the Supernatural* is given over to the discussion of the four types of knowing. The clue to understanding what Oman means here is found in his comment that the four types cannot be defined because they are 'unique and only known by experience'. From this, we can deduce that the four types of knowledge cannot be defined in so far as this would involve breaking them down into component parts. Since Oman considers that the four types are primitive units of human consciousness, he will not allow that they can be analysed into component parts. It is in this sense that the four types cannot be defined. But, though one cannot break down the four types into more basic elements, yet one can point to the characteristic features of the four types and it is in this sense that one can illustrate them but not define them.

A second point that emerges from the quotation above, is that the four types of knowledge are not to be divided. There are two possible ways of construing Oman's meaning. One interpretation is that Oman means to suggest that, though every act of knowledge does not combine the four forms of knowledge, all people will exercise the four types of knowing. This interpretation is unconvincing for it does not do

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[98] NS, p.120.

justice to Oman's argument that the four types of knowledge are not to be divided, though it may be consistent with Oman's comment that the four types 'belong to one mind'.

Another, better, interpretation is that the four types of knowledge are present in any act of knowing. Thus, awareness cannot exist by itself for knowledge involves picking out and identifying particular entities in one's general field of awareness.[99] This means that awareness and apprehension must exist together, and, in so far as they are constitutive of pure perception, they are necessarily part of all knowledge. Further, not only do all acts of knowing involve awareness and apprehension, they will also involve at least nascently comprehension and explanation. Thus, according to Oman, even the most elementary perception will involve an interest in the 'how' and 'why' of that which is perceived.

S1.3.9 Awareness

Oman comments on awareness in the following way:

> While walking in a dreamy mood along a country road, we may have a vivid sense of all that is about us, without attending to anything in particular. Our knowing is then a general field of *awareness*, including scent and sound as well as sight. The more we are entirely in this state of pure awareness, the more all our senses are active, so that we may even have realisation [sic] of the taste of the apples in the orchards and the coolness of the waters in the streams.[100]

The function of the dreamy mood is that it illustrates one moment of the knowledge of environment, natural and supernatural. This illustration teaches that the chief characteristic of awareness is that it is of everything in general and nothing in particular. Such awareness is, though not strictly speaking knowledge, the ground of all perceptual knowledge. There are four different dimensions to the wholeness which is characteristic of awareness. Awareness, in the first place, involves the whole range of the perceiver's senses working in tandem. There is in awareness a 'continual interaction' of the

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[99] NS, p.122.

[100] NS, p.120.

different senses. Thus, in the example which Oman gives, awareness of a landscape will involve not only the visual senses, but a whole range of senses associated with viewing a landscape.

Secondly, in awareness the environment of which one is aware is known as a unity:

> The context of perception is unity of feeling, touching a unity of the world on the one side and a unity of the mind on the other, with an absolute sense of value, at least akin to what we have called the 'undifferentiated holy'.[101]

Part of what Oman is claiming here is that awareness (the unity of feeling) involves the awareness of environment, whether natural and supernatural, as one. In the case of the natural, awareness includes the judgement that the world is one whole (an absolute sense of value), in the case of the supernatural, awareness includes the judgement that there is one undifferentiated sphere of the sacred. Moreover, Oman also suggests that the awareness of the oneness of the natural arises out of the sense of the holy, for it is the awareness of ideal values which enables people to think of their environment as a universe. Since the awareness of ideal values is tied up with the sense of the holy, then it follows that general awareness of the natural arises from the sense of the holy. Thus, there is a religious dimension to all awareness of environment.

Oman is adamant that as men and women know their environment as unitive, so their knowledge reflects an actual dimension of the human environment. In awareness men and women are not imposing a unity upon the world, instead they are simply aware of the nature of the environment, natural and supernatural, as it is. By way of sustaining this point, Oman points out that children often view the environment as one entity with many different manifestations: they are often focally aware that the environment is fundamentally one. Oman thinks that the child's-eye view is more consistent with the way things are than is that perspective which is so taken up with the diversity of the environment that it fails to acknowledge its unity. For Oman, environment is analogous to a person. A person is more than

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[101] NS, p.139.

a mere collocation of actions (manifestations); a person is a unified entity who is manifested in actions.[102] In the same way, the natural and the supernatural are unified spheres. It is moreover Oman's claim, that it is only as the unity of the world is grasped is it possible to move towards objective knowledge. If entities are treated as fundamentally discrete then there is a lack of objectivity for, in reality, all entities are located within a unified field.

Thirdly, in awareness there is a 'unity of mind'. This is to say, in awareness the self is aware of itself as a discrete and autonomous entity.[103] Oman views awareness of the unity of mind as an integral part of human experience. Drawing on his own childhood experiences, Oman argues that the awareness of the environment as a unity finds its concomitant in the self's awareness of being over against its environment. It is the sense of being distinct from one's environment that generates the self's awareness of being a discrete entity. Moreover, the awareness of the finitude of human life tends also to support the self's awareness of being a distinct entity.[104]

S1.3.10 Apprehension

Apprehension involves focusing attention on some aspect of the 'general field of *awareness*', Oman writes:

> Something in this field arouses particular attention, say an object moving toward us on the road. If it specially interest us, as, for example, by being unfamiliar, we concentrate attention on it to see exactly what it is, seeking to *apprehend* it as one object by what appears to be its more relevant and important details. Let us say that we apprehend it to be a man riding a bicycle. [105]

It is Oman's contention that apprehension is strictly speaking pure perception.[106] Since Oman regards apprehension as the pure type of perception - the grasping of the particular within the general field of

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[102] NS, p.142.

[103] NS, p.137.

[104] NS, p.137.

[105] NS, p.120.

[106] NS, p.124.

awareness - apprehension of the supernatural must then involve the attempt to differentiate the undifferentiated environment which is revealed in the sense of the holy. In part, this involves the evaluation of the holy as the realm of the good, the true and the beautiful. But the recognition of the sacred is but the beginning of the religious quest, for religion aims at apprehending the supernatural as it is.

S1.3.11 Comprehension

Oman describes apprehension as being like giving attention to the most important details of an object, such as a bicycle travelling down a road towards us. Comprehension is a stage beyond apprehension, for it involves the attempt to understand what it is that is being apprehended. Oman explains what 'comprehension' refers to in the following way:

> Then, supposing we have none of the information we afterwards learn to include under the name bicycle, but have everything to learn about it, we try, as it approaches, to *comprehend* it. This we do by considering the machine in relation to the man as a means of locomotion: and we think we comprehend it when we understand how it is the means for gaining this end.[107]

The distinguishing mark of comprehension is that it is the attempt to understand an entity which is apprehended in perception. 'Understanding' for Oman suggests the thought that in comprehension the interest of the perceiver is no longer in the object for itself, but in the 'practical significance of a particular aspect of a subject'.[108] That is, the interest behind comprehension is driven by some question which is being posed in relation to the entity. Thus, when an attempt is made to understand how it is that a bicycle can act 'as a means of locomotion' there is inevitably a turning away from the object in its entirety to those aspects of the object which are of importance to answering the question. Thus, whilst in apprehending a tree one might appreciate the texture of its bark, the shape of its branches and the colour of its leaves as well as other aspects of the entity; in comprehending the tree one would only be interested in those properties which might enable one to answer a pressing question. To use

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[107] NS, p.120.

[108] NS, p.178.

Macmurray's terms, the difference between apprehension and comprehension is one between more or less objective ways of grasping the environment.

From the illustration of comprehension that Oman gives, and his talk of comprehension as 'grasping the practical significance', it seems plausible to suppose that the interest which often lies within an act of comprehension is the use value of an entity. More particularly, Oman's bicycle analogy suggests that there are two interests which will motivate comprehension, firstly, there is the desire to identify the purpose that imbues an entity or state of affairs - it is in this sense that Langford is correct to say that 'comprehension' is like Aristotle's idea of final cause, secondly, there is a concern with establishing how the end which imbues a state of affairs or entity is realised. [109]

S1.3.12 Explanation

As against comprehension, explanation represents a further stage of abstraction from the object in itself; Oman, commenting once again on the approaching bicycle, writes:

> Finally, as it passes, we are faced by the problem that it seems to have no support from its breadth, yet keeps upright while travelling along a line. This singularity we must try to *explain*: and we do it with such general principles as the scientific knowledge we happen to possess provides.[110]

If comprehension is driven by an interest in answering practical questions, explanation is interested in an abstract analysis of the general properties of an entity in order to explain how something is brought about. Once again the interest here is, strictly speaking, subjective. The difference between comprehension and explanation is that in comprehension there is a concern with purpose as well as with understanding the 'how' of a state or entity. In explanation, the concern is purely with the abstract explanation of the cause of a state of affairs or entity. Both in comprehension and explanation a

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[109] Langford, p. 230.

[110] NS, p.121.

subjective question is posed to the entity, but explanation represents a more abstract form of knowledge than comprehension.

S1.3.13 The Relation Between the Four Types of Knowledge

In discussing the relation between the four types of knowledge, Oman writes:

> As has been maintained from the first, no division of our problems is absolute but only convenient. As our minds have developed by continuous active interpretation of our whole environment, all our dealing with it concerns our knowing, and that we can impress our meaning on it is not only a very important test of our meaning as a true interpretation, but makes us see the world differently, because though we do not perceive by any kind of understanding or explaining, as we understand and explain our standpoint becomes higher and our horizon wider.[111]

Oman makes three important points here. In the first place, he argues that there is no absolute division between the four types of knowledge, the divisions are only convenient. By this Oman means that the analysis of four types of knowledge is a logical analysis of the four moments of all perceptual knowledge. This interpretation is at variance with that of Langford who suggests that Oman's fourfold typology of knowledge is a temporal analysis. In contrast to Langford, it may be argued that Oman's analysis is logical and not temporal in that he takes pains to stress that perceptual knowledge is one 'continuous active interpretation of our whole environment', and in this it mirrors the unity of feeling, valuation and thought in perception. But, whilst all perception embraces the four types of knowledge, it seems clear that Oman would also argue that the balance between the four moments will vary from perception to perception. Thus, the poet is said to be skilled in apprehending his environment, so that the poet's perceptions will approximate in a marked way to pure perception. On the other hand, intellectuals may so perceive the world through the eyes of explanatory theory that their perceptions may distort the witness of experience. These two instances are the extreme points on the continuum of possible ways in which awareness, apprehension, comprehension and explanation may be combined in perception.

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[111] NS, pp.201-202.

Secondly, Oman distinguishes between pure perception, and comprehension and explanation. This is not to say that Oman is going back on his argument that all types of knowledge are united in perception. Rather, the point is that within perception there are, logically speaking, primary and secondary forms of knowledge. The primary element in perception is what Oman calls pure perception - apprehension in the field of awareness - while the secondary element in perception is the attempt to explain and comprehend that which is perceived in apprehension.

Thirdly, Oman indicates that though comprehension and explanation are secondary elements in perception, yet they nevertheless play a vital role. According to Oman, through comprehension and explanation the perceiver's 'standpoint becomes higher and [...] [his] horizon wider'. From a lofty vantage point one is able to perceive an entity in relation to that which stands in front of it and that which stands behind it. In this sense, Oman may be taken to argue that comprehension and explanation enable perceptual beliefs in which an entity or state is perceived in its temporal relations. Thus, on seeing a ball flying past comprehension and explanation enable the perceiver to perceive the ball as that which has been kicked, and that which, ceteris paribus, will collide with another entity in the near future. Again, Oman argues that comprehension and explanation enable the perceiver to have a 'wider horizon'. By this I take it that Oman is suggesting that intellectual reflection enables the perception of entities or states in their relation to other present entities or states of affairs.

S1.4 The Experience of the Supernatural

The first section has shown that Oman argues that the supernatural is disclosed with and through the natural. Analytically, it may be said that the primary form which religious knowledge takes is an awareness of the undifferentiated holy.[112] In practice, the supernatural is known through the differentiation of the holy. One form which such differentiation takes is the discrimination of the supernatural as the sphere of the ideal: the true, the beautiful, and the good. Moreover, in so far as Oman argues that the intuition of the ideal sphere is constitutive of moral personality, it follows that

[112] Langford, p.234.

knowledge of the supernatural must be universal. If all human beings are counted as moral persons, which is a reasonable assumption, and if a condition of moral personality is some knowledge of the ideal - which is that which frees human beings from the bonds of the given - it follows that all human beings must have knowledge of the ideal. Thus, Oman argues that all people perceive the supernatural sphere (all have at least nascent religious knowledge) and that this fact is most evident through the universal awareness of ideals or intrinsic values.[113]

S2 The Discrimination of the Supernatural

It has been seen that, for Oman, the function of theological discourse (i.e. religious belief) is to enable the exploration of the nature and challenge of the supernatural sphere. Whilst, in Oman's view, religious belief is always tentative - it eschews facile certainties - yet it aims at a truthful representation of the supernatural. In this section, Oman's understanding of the nature of theological objectivity will be discussed. It will be suggested that, in Oman's view, the conditions that make for theological objectivity are a developed sensitivity to the supernatural and a determination to be honest or sincere in one's dealings with the supernatural.

S2.1 Objectivity

Oman is adamant that whilst all knowledge is an interpretation of the environment, yet it can be objective. In arguing this point he suggests that a true judgement is one which corresponds with reality; he assumes a correspondence theory of truth, he comments: 'It must be common to all that they search for truth and hold truth to be what corresponds with reality.'[114]

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[113] In attempting to categorise Oman's work it is interesting to compare it with Sellar's Critical Realism. Oman shares with Sellars a commitment to the view that the environment makes itself known, and that human knowledge is always an active interpretation of environment. See C.F. Delaney, 'Critical Realism', in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, ed. by Robert Audi (Cambridge: CUP, 1995), pp.169-170.

[114] NS, p.104.

Oman amplifies his understanding of objective knowledge as correspondence by an analogy with music.[115] In the production of music the musician creates a meaningful arrangement of sounds which form a melody. There are two ways, broadly speaking, in which a piece of music may be heard. It is perfectly possible to interpret a piece of music as a random series of sounds. Again, a person might hear the melody just as the musician intended. These two possibilities are, of course, the extremes of the continuum of possible ways of interpreting a piece of music. The point is, that the latter of the two possibilities constitutes an objective interpretation of the music. In just the same way, there are many ways to interpret an environment, yet this does not occlude the possibility of an objective interpretation which corresponds to the environment itself.

The discussion has suggested that objective knowledge is that interpretation which corresponds to the environment. Oman indicates that there are two aspects to objective knowledge. On the one hand, objective knowledge must include a correspondence between how an item is valued (intrinsically or extrinsically) and the nature of the item. Secondly, the objectivity of knowledge is concerned with the correct recognition of the entities or states which are in view.

Oman is clear that one never has absolute assurance of the truth of our knowledge. Thus, whilst he is committed to the rationalist insistence on an open and fearless inquiry into reality, yet he is critical of the application of this principle in the rationalism of Descartes and others.[116] Oman's criticism of rationalism is that in advocating independence from all accepted judgements and in setting up a standard for knowledge that stresses certainty, it effectively misunderstood the human condition and impoverished human knowledge.[117] Oman affirms that we do in fact have a great deal of knowledge of

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[115] NS, pp.174-175.

[116] NS, pp.99-102.

[117] NS, pp.102-103.

our environment, though very little of our knowledge is certain. The uncertainty of our knowledge means that the intellectual quest is an adventure calling for courage as well as humility.[118]

S2.2 The Conditions of Objectivity

Whilst there is no final knowledge of the supernatural, nevertheless Oman argues that it is possible to identify the conditions which will allow a progressive growth in one's knowledge. For Oman the relative objectivity of religious belief is safeguarded by the attempt to root it in the disclosure of the supernatural in experience, for it is only as the religious person attempts to stay close to experience that she can be confident that her beliefs refer beyond themselves to an extra-mental reality, the supernatural realm. Oman makes a most striking reference to this 'condition' in his prefaces to his best known book *Grace and Personality*. In the preface to the first edition, Oman speaks of his 'method' as being 'more important than any particular application'.[119] In the preface to the 2nd edition of the work, Oman goes on to explain what he means by his 'method'. According to Oman his method rests on the presupposition that:

> In religion, as in all other subjects, truth can only rest securely on the witness of the reality to itself, and that, in religion, more than in any other subject, it must be a witness to ourselves. [120]

Oman argues that in theology it is imperative to pay close and continuing attention to the witness of the supernatural to itself in our experience: 'Only if we see grace as it works on earth [writes Oman] and understand it as it affects our own experience, can we possibly hope to have either clearness or certainty.'[121] In explaining the importance of focusing on the witness of experience, Oman discusses the unhelpful consequences of sitting loose to experience. He suggests that an overemphasis on comprehension and explanation (what he sometimes calls argument) can often lead to a 'subjective, remote, anthropocentric' view of the human environment.[122] When, for instance, it was thought that

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[118] NS, pp.146-147.

[119] GP, p.vi.

[120] GP, p.viii.

[121] GP, p.40.

[122] HR, p.29.

Newtonian physics revealed the whole truth about the world people's view of the world became a desiccated one.[123]

Again, when theology explains 'all doings and all designs as either process or predestination', then the witness of experience is corrupted by 'the blight of such contentions'.[124] In both cases the problems arise from a incorrect method of argumentation. The attenuation of the human experience of environment comes about, according to Oman, when elements of experience are abstracted from the wholeness of experience, and then used as a key by which to offer an interpretation of experience as a whole. Thus, in the case of Calvin's doctrine of predestination, God's gracious 'foresight and prevision' which are known in experience were separated from the 'uncertainties and difficulties' with which they are always associated in experience. Abstracted from the relations which they always bear, God's foresight and prevision then became omniscience and omnipotence, and these, in turn, became the keys by which to understand the doings of God in the world. The outcome was the corruption of the idea of grace. Grace, for Oman, is to do with God stooping 'to win the heart', whilst in Calvin's system grace 'is only power which breaks what will not bend'.[125] Thus, Calvin's tendency to abstract from experience led him to offer an impersonal view of the operation of grace. It is Oman's contention that all attempts to erect finalities arise from the attempt to abstract 'truths from their place in life'.[126]

In distinction to those approaches which corrupt the witness of experience by abstraction, are those which endeavour to stay close to experience. According to Oman, staying close to experience means living rightly within the sphere of the supernatural such that the nature of the supernatural is progressively disclosed.[127] Living rightly within the supernatural involves the transformation of the natural. That is, Oman argues that progressive insight into the nature of the supernatural is gained as the attempt is made to live, here and now, in terms of the insights which have already been gained. It is as

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[123] HR, p.24.

[124] HR, p.28.

[125] HR, p.28.

[126] HR, pp.28-29.

[127] NS, p.336.

people live in the light of the ideal here and now that they discover an 'intercourse with a greatness which admits of no finality, but requires absoluteness of loyalty both in seeking to know and to serve its ever expanding requirements'.[128] It is, then, as truth, goodness and beauty are sought and acted upon here and now that there is a progressive disclosure of the nature of the supernatural, for the supernatural is 'attainable as a possession and power only as we continually strive to attain and set the mark still farther forward'.[129] Moreover, it is new revelation which is attained through the search for the supernatural. In this sense the religious quest is different from the quest of the other sciences. They seek, on the one hand, to understand that which is; the religious quest, on the other, is concerned with the supernatural which is 'still unrealised'.[130] The distinction here is between that which is in principle fully knowable: the natural world 'at least up-to-date'; and that which is in principle not knowable, for it is not fully within the range of human knowledge in so far as it is being progressively disclosed.[131]

Oman claims that the supernatural is disclosed through the natural, and this takes place by the on-going routinisation of what is regarded as sacred, such that 'what was once holy for men has become the ordinary, once sacred the commonplace and profane, once the Supernatural; the merely rational or even the irrational'.[132] Oman argues that people grow in their understanding of the supernatural sphere as they attempt to live in terms of their understanding of it. When a certain understanding of what is sacred becomes routine, then there is the challenge to move beyond this understanding to a more elevated view of the sacred. One possible example of what Oman is talking about is the emancipation of slaves in the 19th century. The struggle for the emancipation of slaves was treated by the Clapham Sect as a 'high and sacred endeavour', for it reflected, it may be thought, an understanding of the sacred value to be placed on every human being.[133] This understanding of the value of every human being is now commonplace, though perhaps described in other terms, such that it is a 'secure achievement'.[134] The

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[128] NS, p.337.

[129] NS, p.336.

[130] NS, p.337.

[131] NS, p.337.

[132] NS, pp.337-338.

[133] NS, p.338.

[134] NS, p.337.

attainment of this insight inspires Christians to fix the mark higher and wider out, such that with this real insight into the sacred realm there is a demand to go further in pursuing the 'infinite and eternal'.[135] Thus, progress in knowledge of the supernatural comes about through the attempt to transform that which is, the natural, in the light of the ideal, the supernatural. Religious knowledge is not gained through the acceptance or rejection of the natural, but by the natural becoming progressively diaphanous (a symbol) of the spiritual.[136]

S2.2.1 Sensuousness as a Condition of Objectivity

The first condition of staying close to experience is the capacity to discriminate correctly that which is disclosed, namely the supernatural sphere. According to Oman, the development of the capacity to discriminate the nature of an environment is dependent, firstly, upon the existence of an objective interest in that environment. Secondly, the development of sensitivity is related to the existence of circumstances in which an independent view is encouraged.

Oman argues that the capacity to be aware of and apprehend that which is given in environment is the absolute precondition of an objective view of environment, and this capacity is variously described by Oman as sensitiveness or sensuousness, which refer to the keenness of the senses.[137] In the case of the supernatural they refer to the keenness of the sense or feeling of the holy. In analysing 'sensuousness' Oman takes 'the poet and the child' as the ideal type of the true perceiver. Great poets, according to Oman, are marked by a uniquely developed sensuousness, and from studying them we see that sensuousness is a capacity that must be learned, and that the ground upon which sensuousness develops is a passionate disinterested concern with understanding the environment for its own sake.[138] Moreover, objective interest is related to an aesthetic pleasure or 'joy in our whole awareness of environment'; as a

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[135] NS, p.338.

[136] NS, p.338.

[137] NS, pp.141; 125.

[138] NS, p.142.

person finds pleasure in their environment, so they will have a passionate interest in the exploration of that environment.[139]

Oman, in trying to understand the development of an objective interest, refers to his own experience as a child brought up in rural Orkney. His belief, born from reflection on his own childhood, is that the capacity to perceive an environment is related, in the first instance, to communion with a 'living nature'. What he may have in mind here is the belief that in living close to nature a person will come to love the diversity and beauty of the world around, such that they will develop an interest in exploring the natural. Again, he also holds that the development of sensitivity to environment is also dependent on a certain independence of thought. Oman holds that social convention and authoritarian modes of instruction can mar the development of the capacity to perceive the environment as it discloses itself. People who wish to be sensitive to the natural and the supernatural must refuse to allow their experience to be shaped by the procrustean bed of social convention, they must be willing to look for themselves, and come to an independent judgement as to nature and challenge of environment.

S2.2.2 Sincerity: An Attitude that underlies Perceptual Objectivity

Sincerity is a second condition of staying close to experience in the development of religious belief. According to Oman, the poet is marked not only by a developed sensuousness but also by an 'aesthetic sincerity', where aesthetic means 'the response of feeling to all experience of environment'.[140]. According to Oman, aesthetic sincerity is the 'supreme characteristic' of true poets, and their sincerity lies in their 'objective, unrestricted, unflinching facing of every kind of feeling, and all it revealed.'

Among the definitions which the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary gives to sincerity are, unadulterated and free from foreign elements, and free from dissimulation or deception. These two definitions are relevant to understanding Oman's use of sincerity. In Oman's view, the task of the poet is to give an

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[139] NS, p.141.

[140] NS, p.126.

account of the world as it is. The poet's sincerity involves putting their own whims and fancies to one side in order to focus on representing the world as it is without dissimulation or deception. Thus, the poet's great gift and vocation is to 'hold the mirror up to nature'.[141]

'Sincerity' then, refers to the conscious intention to present the world as it is, and such an intention requires a great deal of courage involving as it does the eschewing of 'average opinions or conventionalities'.[142] The moral courage of the poet arises from a 'love of truth' and the poet's courage is seen in a determination to present the world with all its stresses. According to Oman, one illustration of the courage of the poet is found in Shakespeare's portrayal of 'melancholy'.[143] Shakespeare's 'melancholy' is illustrated in his view of time which he regards not just a succession of moments, but as a 'quality of dominating insistence', a harbinger of human finitude.

Oman suggests that sincerity is a necessary condition of objective knowledge of any environment, and, in particular, of the supernatural. One dimension of this attitude, as it applies to the supernatural, is the recognition of the provisionality of all knowledge of the supernatural. There can be no finality in one's view of the supernatural, and courage is required if one is unflinchingly to face up to the uncertainty of one's grasp of the ideal. It follows that the typical form which insincerity in religion takes is the search for finalities or certainties, such as the search for fixed organisations, fixed ideals, and fixed theologies. In Oman's mind, the common feature of all these searches is that they reflect the desire to avoid facing up to the human environment as it is: they are all forms of the search for security in an insecure world. For Oman, honesty forbids the postulation of finalities, but, 'Perhaps the sad story of man's whole history is that he would rather "have bondage with ease than strenuous liberty" and that this is just what life is appointed to disturb.'[144] The setting up of finalities is, then, the attempt to avoid the hard challenges posed by the human environment. Oman comments that, 'To regard our opinions and

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[141] NS, p.126.

[142] NS, p.131.

[143] NS, p.131.

[144] HR, p.40.

practices as sacred is indeed the only quite impenetrable barricade against the assaults of chastening experience.'[145]

S2.2.3 The Confirmation of Religious Belief

If objective knowledge is the assigning of an interpretation to the environment which corresponds to the environment, it is pertinent to ask how it is possible to be sure that a correspondence of meanings has been secured. Part of the answer which Oman gives to this question, is to stress his belief that humans stand in a direct cognitive relation to their environment. This assertion involves, firstly, a belief that the environment is accessible to human knowing:

> Possibly the chief difficulty in our understanding of perception is just the poverty-stricken nature of our idea of the environment and its power to make itself known, which the reduction of awareness and apprehension to comprehension and explanation is apt to give.[146]

Oman's particular claim is that in awareness there is a preconceptual felt relation to the environment which is the ground of apprehension. It is this preconceptual relation to the environment (natural and supernatural) that enables the claim that human knowledge may be objective. But the assertion that the knower has a direct relation to environment, is hardly the basis for a particular assertion that X corresponds to Y; it is simply a necessary assumption of Oman's view that the supernatural may be known objectively. This being the case, Oman indicates some specific ways in which the objectivity of knowledge may be tested. One suggestion which he has is that one may test one's interpretations of the environment by acting in terms of those meanings. If one acts in terms of one's putative knowledge and if one discovers that the environment is responsive to those actions, then one may conclude that one's knowledge corresponds to the environment. Oman discusses the confirmation of knowledge in relation to two different sorts of interpretations. He suggests that the theoretical quantitative interpretations (explanations) of physical science may be tested by bringing them to the environment in active ways.[147] If scientists suggest the hypothesis that if X then Y, if we bring X about then Y ought to follow. If by

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[145] NS, p.75.

[146] NS, p.125.

[147] NS, pp.201-202.

experiment we find that Y does follow from X then, in Oman's terms, we 'impress our meaning' on the environment or, to state the point more clearly, we show that our interpretation may well correspond to the environment as it is. That is, if we act upon the environment and discover it responding in the ways that we have anticipated in our theories then there is prima facie evidence that the environment is as our theory interprets it, and in this way a meaning may be regarded 'as true interpretation'.[148] Oman recognises that the judgements of science may be verified in a way that is very impressive, for such judgements enable humans to control their environment, and such control is tangible evidence of the objectivity of certain theoretical judgements.[149]

But it is not only theoretical judgements that can be tested, other forms of interpretation can also be tested.[150] As we have seen 'sincerity' for Oman means the honest appraisal of the environment.[151] Thus, 'sincere living' must mean the honest attempt to live in terms of one's apprehension of the environment. To apprehend one's environment and to live in terms of this apprehension is a 'call to adventure', for all knowledge is provisional and human beings are therefore constantly called onwards to further discoveries and new ways of life.[152] Moreover, to live sincerely requires 'steadfast purpose', that is, determined perseverance and 'humble courage'.[153] In Oman's terms, humility describes one's sense of ignorance before the greatness of the human environment, and it is the uncertainty created by the awareness of ignorance that ensures that sincere living involves courage and a spirit of adventure.

Oman's discussion of sincere living suggests that he believes that our putative insights into the religious sphere may be tested by acting in terms of them. In *Honest Religion* Oman argues that the sensation of the physical world 'rapidly passes into action and by it to objective reality'.[154] That is, the conviction

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[148] NS, p.202.

[149] NS, p.204.

[150] NS, p.203.

[151] Oman uses 'sincerity' and 'honesty' somewhat interchangeably. Thus, in his final book *Honest Religion* honesty takes the place of sincerity.

[152] NS, pp.146-147.

[153] NS, p.147.

[154] HR, p.XI.

that an objective reality exists is dependent upon the active involvement with it. Moreover, through action one becomes aware of the nature of reality. This principle will apply to a range of putative knowledge. If one interpreted an entity as a door, then one would expect it to open given a sharp pull. If the entity refused to budge, then the conclusion might be that one had perceived wrongly. Again, if one holds a particular understanding of the nature of God and his relation to the world, then one might expect that in acting in terms of this insight, one might find one's insight confirmed by the responsiveness of the environment to one's actions. Oman is somewhat vague on what exactly one might expect of the environment in such circumstances, but from a general consideration of his work it is possible to suggest some ways in which a religious idea might be confirmed in practice. Firstly, since in Oman's view the purpose of God is to cultivate the growth of moral persons, so a religious insight will be partially verified if its theoretical and practical impact is consistent with this end. Secondly, Oman holds that undergirding the search for the true, the good and the beautiful, is a theoretical and practical relation to the world based on the insight that 'the world belongs to [...] God and his rule of love'.[155] This being so, it follows that a religious insight will be confirmed in so far as it, in practice, strengthens this relation to the environment.

Another way in which Oman sees putative knowledge as being verified is by its capacity to enable fresh insight into the human environment, thus:

> When the Greek saw the beauty of the wine-coloured sea and the Hebrew the marvel of the morning changing the earth as clay under the seal, it was a higher way of perceiving and not merely a higher way of being pleased.[156]

According to Oman, if an insight generates new ways of apprehending the environment then that insight has a degree of confirmation. Further, and this brings us back to the discussion above, Oman contends that new insight into the human environment is the fruit, not only of sincere inquiry, but of sincere living:

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[155] Macleod, p.352.

[156] NS, p.202.

> We know our environment only as we rightly live in it, and we rise to the height of its meaning according to the kind of persons we are.[157]

Oman's view is that people grow in insight into the human environment as they value it sincerely and live in terms of their insights into its nature. Moreover, in that the structure of reality is disclosed in response to the responsible, sincere search, so, Oman claims, does reality manifest itself as 'personal': it responds to the quest for responsible autonomy.[158] And this is to say, that in the experience of the responsiveness of the environment to the human search for freedom, there is the manifestation of the personal character of God who 'while distinct from this personal, independently structured world, is manifest through it'.[159]

One aspect of the epistemic role of sincerity is that the idea of the environment as a universe - a 'complete scheme' - arises out of 'our ideals [insights into the true, the beautiful and the good] being effective in it'.[160] That is, the attempt to live in terms of our putative knowledge leads, in so far as this knowledge is confirmed by experience, to the insight that the universe, because it can be understood as interrelated field, is best regarded as one whole and not as a collocation of discrete entities. Thus, the assumption that underlies all our attempts at knowing - that there is absolute truth, beauty and goodness - is confirmed to the extent that our insights into the true, the beautiful and the good are consonant with experience.

There is another dimension, not so far touched on, to Oman's claim that sincere living generates new insight into the nature of reality. Oman, following what he sees as the discovery of the Enlightenment, places much emphasis on the responsibility of the individual to discover for themselves what is true. Knowledge, for Oman, is not constituted by a body of propositions which people simply accept. Rather, knowledge is the perceptual meaning which a person becomes individually convinced of as true. This

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[157] NS, p.204.

[158] Bevans, p.76.

[159] Bevans, p.76.

[160] NS, p.330.

view of knowledge is, of course, consistent with his understanding of moral personality. It is against the background of Oman's understanding of knowledge that we may interpret his assertions regarding the cognitive implications of sincere living. Thus, for instance, Oman might argue that to know that a chair is trustworthy is not simply a matter of being told that it is; it is rather a matter of discovering for oneself that it is trustworthy. Thus, to know that trustworthiness can be predicated of a chair is an insight which is closely related to the attempt to sit on the chair. In this way, the act of knowing and knowledge gathering cannot be cut off from the attempt to live in terms of the knowledge which one claims.

Conclusion: Religious Belief and Experience

The second section has shown that Oman holds that there are two levels at which religious belief and experience are related. Firstly, veridical religious belief arises out of certain ways of experiencing and acting within the world. That is, Oman contends that true religious belief is based upon an attitude of awe and wonder, and a determination to deal with the supernatural environment honestly. For Oman, 'honesty' refers to the determination to recognise the supernatural for what it is, and to live in terms of that of which one has become convinced.

Secondly, Oman's view is that true religious belief is self-consciously exploratory. Its aim is the exploration of that which lies behind all human progress and moral personality itself, namely the supernatural sphere as it discloses itself in experience. Corresponding to this broad aim, believers develop their religious beliefs by drawing on the widest possible range of human experience and insight. Amongst the resources which guide the development of religious belief are sacred texts and writings, but these are not authorities determining religious belief, they are only sources of inspiration and guidance to the believer. Ultimately, it is the witness of experience itself as it is apprehended by individual believers and theologians which must shape religious belief. This view is concomitant to Oman's argument that the function of religious belief (thought) is to enable individuals to perceive the supernatural more

veridically and to respond to it more fully. In that this is the immediate function of religious belief, it is true also that the wider function of religious belief is the realisation of human freedom.

Chapter 7

The Feeling of the Holy and the Search for Truth

Oman argues that religious belief arises in response to the awareness of the supernatural as it discloses itself through feeling in the natural sphere. Logically and temporally that which is known through the feeling of the holy is the undifferentiated holy, but largely in history the sense of the holy takes the form of a general awareness of the sphere of the ideal: the good, the true and the beautiful. Oman holds that religious belief aims at the discrimination of the supernatural, and that this is a progressive process since all knowledge is an active interpretation of the meaning of the environment. According to Oman, religious belief develops as individuals seek to appropriate the supernatural with sincerity, and to live in the light of the insights which they have obtained.

It will be maintained here that Oman's assertion that the supernatural is disclosed through feeling is both conceptually possible and defensible, but that it is implausible to hold that logically the supernatural is first encountered as the undifferentiated holy or the sphere of the ideal. Oman's understanding of the nature of religious belief is defensible and enriches our understanding of Christianity, though his work at this point requires some development in so far as he tends not to give full expression to what is implicit or at least suggested in his work, that is, the communal context in which religious belief arises and is developed.

S1 The Ground of Religious Belief: The Feeling of the Holy

Prior to addressing the issue of the plausibility of Oman's work in this area, it is of interest to ask why it is that Oman find the thesis, that feeling underlies religion, an attractive one. Madges' comment on Schleiermacher may shed some light on Oman's use of feeling, he writes:

> By grounding religion in feeling, Schleiermacher was attempting to show that religion is rooted in human experience and, consequently, that it was accessible to every person - from the least educated to the most sophisticated. Religion was not to be confused with philosophical speculation or reduced to moral living. Rather, it was to be acknowledged as something simple, sublime and sui generis.[1]

There is some evidence to suggest that Oman's use of feeling, like that of Schleiermacher, is tied up with his concern to discuss religion as a living part of the lives of ordinary men and women. It is notable that Oman's theology was first developed in the books and sermons which he worked on whilst serving as a presbyterian minister in Alnwick. Oman's ministry in Alnwick was marked by a 'penetration and insight into human nature that would be difficult to equal', and a concern to apply religious insights to the 'difficulties and tasks' faced by 'ordinary mortals'.[2] There is a clear affinity between Oman's pastoral concerns and the prominent role of feeling in his work, and it is probably the case that the first influenced the development of the second. Moreover, this postulation is strengthened by the fact that it was whilst working in Alnwick that Oman produced his translation of Schleiermacher's *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultural Despisers*[3]; Healey notes that one of things which most impressed Oman about Schleiermacher's work was his commitment to viewing religion as a 'vital' element in human life.[4]

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[1] William Madges, 'Faith, Knowledge and Feeling: Towards an Understanding of Kuhn's Appraisal of Schleiermacher', *Heythrop Journal*, 37 (1996), 47-60 (p.48).

[2] Healey, *Religion and Reality*, p.152.

[3] Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultural Despisers*, trans. and introduction by John Oman, (London: Kegan Paul, 1893).

[4] Healey, p.21.

S1.1 The Concept of Feeling

Alston has suggested that the concept of feeling is a protean one, and that there are at least nine uses to which it may be put: perceptual, feeling a piece of wood; exploratory, feeling for something in the dark; bodily sensation, feeling a pain in one's leg; bodily condition, feeling sleepy; hedonic tone, feeling good; emotional, feeling distressed; tendency, feeling like taking a walk; epistemic, feeling that a certain team will win the cup; attitudinal, feeling sorry for someone.[5]

A consideration of Alston's classification of feeling suggest that feelings of different sorts may be disclosive of states and entities of both a mental and a non-mental sort. The first thing to note is that Alston's classification suggests that feelings are, in general, intentional: they are a response to some state or entity either mental or non-mental. Thus, for instance, the feeling of awe is a response to an encounter with an awesome person or thing, or to the thought of such a person or thing; 'feeling like a walk' might be a response to a sense of boredom.[6] Moreover, in so far as feelings are intentional it can be argued that they may also disclose states or entities which may not be knowable except through the feelings they engender. Thus, a rotten tooth is generally disclosed through toothache, and feelings may also disclose states and entities which exist independently of their being known by any particular person. In this regard, Macquarrie argues that feelings are 'perhaps our most direct openings on to the world'; they unite the human being to the world in a way analogous to touch, such that feelings hold the human being in an intimate relation to the world.[7] Indeed, according to Macquarrie, feelings are 'a kind of register of my being-in-the-world' from the point of view of a participant rather than a spectator. From this perspective, feelings or affects can reveal 'truths concerning the world such as would be quite inaccessible through that mere beholding which characterises our observation of the world through the senses'.[8] Macquarrie goes on to specify one type of knowledge that feeling generates. He refers to a person's sorrow at the decimation of a hillside after a forest fire, and he argues that such sorrow is not purely an inner mental state projected outwards, but that the sorrow corresponds to the condition of the

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[5] Alston, 'Emotion and Feeling', p.483.

[6] Vernon Pratt, 'Feeling Awed by God', *Mind*, 79 (1970), 607-612.

[7] John Macquarrie, *Existentialism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p.157.

[8] Macquarrie, pp.158-159.

hillside: it is intentional.[9] Moreover, the fact that sadness is recognised as the appropriate emotion, suggests that such feelings 'attune' people to a real state of affairs.

Macquarrie's analysis suggests that different modalities of feeling can be disclosive. Thus, attitudinal emotions such as sadness as well as the feeling of toothache can disclose states of affairs and entities, and in the light of this insight Alston's classification of feeling requires some modification, for he appears to suggest that the modes of feeling which disclose states and entities external to consciousness are to be distinguished from emotion. In contrast, it can be argued that emotions can be disclosive, and that such emotions may be either temporary or relatively permanent. With regard to this latter point, Oman holds that the feeling of awe is a permanent response to the supernatural environment, and that, in this respect, it may be compared to the ordinary senses.

By definition, a disclosive feeling must carry some cognitive content. The mode and intensity of the feelings engendered by a state or entity will give rise to at least a general awareness of that which is encountered. Moreover, if one accepts Oman's argument, it is upon the basis of the felt knowledge of environment as it is subjected to evaluation and reflection that the individual comes to interpret the meaning of environment. This means, in part, that perceptual beliefs arise out of the attempt to specify that which is immediately known in feeling and such specification will involve the application of concepts to the knowledge generated by feeling. Alston helpfully suggests, in this regard, that in accounting for the perceptual beliefs which arise out of putative experiences of the not-self, it is important to think of them as arising within a social practice in which there are implicit criteria by which justified and non-justified beliefs are identified. Such criteria will include internal consistency, consistency with other established knowledge and explanatory fruitfulness.[10]

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[9] Macquarrie, p.159.

[10] Alston, *Perceiving God*, p. 72.

S1.1.1 An Argument Rebutted

One influential argument which aims to show that feeling cannot be a sui generis mode of disclosure is that which holds that there is no uninterpreted experience. Madges, commenting on Schleiermacher, writes:

> If religious self-consciousness is to have any cognitive component, then it cannot be entirely independent of at least some concepts. There must be a conceptual or 'objective' dimension to religious consciousness.[11]

Madges' meaning in saying that religious cognition is dependent on concepts is clear. Concepts lie in the realm of thought, and Madges is arguing that feeling (self-consciousness) is only of cognitive value in relation to thought. Moreover, the relation of feeling to thought must be a responsive one. Explicitly underlying Madges position is the work of Proudfoot who argues that:

> There is no uninterpreted experience. Our experience [he continues] is already informed and constituted by our conceptions and tacit theories about ourselves and our world. All observation is theory laden. We can design procedures in which certain hypotheses can be tested, but any perception or experience is already shaped by the concepts and implicit judgements we bring to it. In this sense, we are constantly engaged in interpretation and reinterpretation. As problems arise, inquiry is initiated and we search for solutions. Thought has been characterized as the search for increasingly adequate explanations.[12]

Since primary knowledge of the not-self is by perception, then Proudfoot's meaning is that all perceptual experience is shaped by ideas and concepts. This is the basis of the claim that there is no uninterpreted experience.

There are two arguments that might be deployed against the argument of Proudfoot and Madges, which together modify the impact of their case. In the first case, it might be pointed out that there is empirical evidence that feeling can produce knowledge which precedes and conditions the application of concepts

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[11] Madges, p.55.

[12] Proudfoot, *Religious Experience* (Berkeley: University of California, 1985), p.43.

to experience. In a study of a clinical case, Antonio Damasio, the neurologist, found that the impairment of the part of the brain which deals with feelings coincided with the impairment of the patient's ability to make rational decisions:

> Flawed reason and impaired feelings stood out together as the consequences of a specific brain lesion, and this correlation suggested to me that feeling was an integral component of the machinery of reason.[13]

On the basis of this observation and others like it, Damasio goes on to develop a seminal thesis. He argues that reason, the capacity to make rational decisions, is physiologically enmeshed with feelings and emotions. The feelings and emotions are the light of the body, they record the emotional and psychological state of the body.[14] The feelings are said to guide decision making by alerting the rational faculties to the possibilities inherent in the situations which the self faces. The feelings can do this for, on the basis of memory, the self feels positively or negatively towards any situation which it encounters. The feelings give, in Damasio's view, a kind of foreknowledge (a hunch) about situations, and in this way the feelings enable the identification of those aspects of the situation which need to be taken into account by reason. In other words, Damasio reports that feelings play an important role in everyday responses to the environment. They engender, he suggests, a general non-conceptual knowledge and predispose the forming of certain concepts.

Secondly, it can be argued that the analysis of perception suggests the occurrence of forms of awareness not shaped by concepts. Two illustrations will bring out the argument here. Firstly, if a person is sitting in a car which is unexpectedly hit by another car then the first reaction is likely to be, 'what was that'?[15] The fact that such a question would be asked indicates that the person has become immediately aware of something; they have had an immediate experience of something having happened without being able to

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[13] Antonio R. Damasio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain* (London: Picador, 1995), p. XII.

[14] Damasio, pp.159-160.

[15] Louis Arnaud Reid, 'Feeling, Thinking, Knowing', *Aristotelian Society*, 77 (1976-77), 165-182 (p.172).

say what. In Dretske's terms, the person has perceived an event but not a fact.[16] The immediate experience involved in an unexpected car crash leads on to the attempt to identify what it is that has happened; the search for propositional knowledge follows and is initiated by immediate experience. Moreover, immediate knowledge is non-conceptual. The immediate experience involved in the instance of an unexpected car collision is a piece of felt knowledge, it is only when an attempt is made to specify this knowledge that concepts come into play.

Again, it is common for a person to be so preoccupied with something or other that they do not notice what is going on around them. They are aware of what is around them, but they have, in Dretske's terms, no positive belief content about that of which they are aware.[17] This everyday situation suggests the strong possibility of the existence of modes of awareness which are not shaped by concepts.

S1.1.2 Both Possible and Plausible!

The argument so far has gone some away to establishing the possibility and, to the extent that Proudfoot and Madges have been effectively rebutted, the plausibility of the argument that feeling can be a sui generis form of knowledge of the environment which precedes and gives rise to perceptual beliefs and reflection. When one adds to these assertions the conclusion of Chapter 5 that Christian belief arises in response to an a priori awareness of the divine, then it seems that there are reasonable grounds for allowing Oman's proposition that the supernatural is disclosed through a feeling of awe which pervades human consciousness of the natural.

S1.2 The Sphere of the Ideal

There is a good case, however, that it is implausible to hold that logically speaking all religious belief arises in response to the undifferentiated sphere of the holy. Firstly, such a assertion is in tension with the conclusions reached in Chapter Five. There it was argued that there are sound reasons for holding

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[16] Fred Dretske, 'Perception', in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, ed. by Robert Audi (Cambridge: CUP, 1995), pp.568-572 (p.568).

[17] Fred Dretske, *Seeing and Knowing* (London: Routledge, 1969), p.7.

that Christian belief arises in response to an a priori awareness of divine presence, and that some other religious traditions may arise in response to the awareness of some other dimension of the supreme reality. Oman's account of religion clashes with these conclusions in so far as it involves the claim that there is one awareness of the supernatural which is common to all religions. Moreover, such a claim is substantially undermined by Katz's analysis of the putative mystical experiences claimed by adherents of different religious traditions, which strongly suggests that that there is no unitive awareness underlying all religions. It may be, of course, that it is possible a posteriori to identify, through the comparative analysis of religious traditions, certain common practices and beliefs which may suggest that many religions relate to a common supreme reality, but this is quite different from Oman's claim that all religions arise from a common awareness of a supreme reality.[18]

Secondly, Oman's account of religion in general stands in tension with some of the basic and very valuable principles of his work as a whole. It may be pointed out, for instance, that the argument that religion as a whole and Christianity in particular arises in response to the undifferentiated holy, stands in tension with the general principle, which Oman enunciates in *Grace and Personality* that, Christian belief must be interpreted throughout from the standpoint of the 'personal'. As Farmer notes, the notion of the undifferentiated holy seems to suggest that at a most fundamental level religious faith arises in response to the awareness of what seems like a non-personal reality[19] Moreover, the idea of the undifferentiated holy suggests that religion is ultimately grounded in the awareness of a sphere which is relatively inert. This suggestion sits uneasily with Oman's idea that knowledge of God arises in part through revelation. For the concept of revelation suggests the active disclosure of the suprasensory, but the idea of the undifferentiated holy is suggestive of a realm which is inertly waiting to be discovered.[20]

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[18] This may be part of the underlying task of Keith Ward in his series of books comparing the account of different religious traditions of certain key concepts. See , for instance, *Religion and Revelation* & *Religion and Creation*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996).

[19] Herbert H Farmer, *Revelation and Religion*, (London: Nisbet, 1954), p.28.

[20] Ward, *Religion and Revelation*, p.215.

Thirdly, and finally, Oman argues that the general occurrence of a faith in the orderliness of the material environment suggests that there is a general intuition of the sphere of the ideal. It may be affirmed that the connection which Oman suggests between the fundamental postulate that the environment is orderly and the intuition of a non-material reality is defensible, but that the argument actually supports the view that there is a general awareness of active presence exhibiting mind and will; the argument is more consonant with the conclusions of Chapter Five than with those of Oman.

As was seen above, John Macmurray makes the point that it is a basic assumption of all agency that the environment is an intelligible unity. The fact that there is a general faith in the orderliness of the environment is a point which has been widely recognised. Thomas Torrance, for instance, in describing scientific practice, comments:

> We can engage in science only through a profound faith in the accessibility of things to rational understanding.[21]

Again, Keith Ward, writes that there is a general faith:

> In the rational structure of reality, which is inherently knowable, mostly by mathematical means.[22]

He continues:

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[21] T.F.Torrance, *God and Rationality*, (London: OUP, 1971), p.12.

[22] *God, Chance and Necessity*, (Oxford: One World, 1996), pp.24-25.

> Faith in the comprehensibility of the universe is in fact faith in the ultimate truth, beauty and goodness of reality, in the virtue of pursuing them and in the certain hope of eventually finding them. It is faith in truth, because it postulates that the human mind can formulate and understand an objective truth about the way the world is, whether or not it is to our liking. It is faith in beauty, because the criteria often used in the intellectual search are those of the simplicity, elegance and beauty of the basic laws of being. It is faith in goodness, because it presupposes that the universe itself is 'friendly' to our investigations, allowing itself to be understood and in that way fulfilling the deepest potentialities of our intellectual natures.[23]

The faith which is exhibited in the order of the environment is somewhat of a problem for clearly it goes far beyond the available evidence, in that, there are 'millions of things we do not understand, including the fundamentals of quantum physics'.[24] Moreover, the practical utility of the belief in order cannot be a wholly satisfactory explanation of this phenomenon. It may, however, be suggested that some of the arguments current in modern science lend credence to the view that the general faith in the orderliness of the universe arises from an intuitive awareness of a supreme being, who is in an active relation to the whole of the material universe.

In modern physics, the Hartle-Hawking model attempts to account for the material universe in terms of a 'wider timeless domain of three spaces linked in 'fuzzy' ways', Ward comments:

> The model aims to resolve time, as we experience it, into a wider mathematically statable reality.[25]

This model putatively does away with the need for a creator, in the sense that it does away with the need to postulate a first temporal moment for the universe. But it does not do away with the need for some account of why the putative four basic forces of the universe operate according to mathematically structured invariable laws.[26] According to Ward, there are good reasons for holding that the Hartle-Hawking model may be consonant with a theistic account of the continuance of the universe for the:

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[23] p.25.

[24] Ward, p.24.

[25] Ward, *Religion and Creation*, p.295.

[26] Ward, p.295.

> Postulation of such a 'thing' as a four- (or more) dimensional superspace, containing, among other components, imaginary time and probabilistic 'non-reduced' quantum fields [...] seems remarkably like positing a purely conceptual reality as the ontological basis of material and ordinarily temporal reality.[27]

Thus the model moves in the direction of an account of the orderliness of the universe in terms of 'a deeper, intelligible, beautiful and non-material reality'.[28] Moreover, in so far as the model involves the postulation of a quasi-conceptual reality as the basis of the basic structure of the material universe, so it tends to support a theistic account for 'the natural place for conceptual realities to exist is in some supra cosmic mind.'[29]

Further support for the theistic account of the orderliness of the universe can be taken from some of the findings of quantum physics. One of the intriguing conclusions of quantum cosmology is that the micro-processes which underlie the fundamental laws of the universe are non-deterministic in nature.[30] This means that there was no necessity for the appearance of a universe as it is, nor for the continuance of the universe as it is. Both the fundamental laws of the universe, and the actual appearance of the universe might have been different. On the basis of this finding, and bearing in mind the extremely narrow perimeters within which the universe had to develop to produce rational consciousness, it may be suggested that there is a high degree of improbability in the emergence of the universe we inhabit.[31] The vast improbability of the emergence of the universe as it is[32] provides fertile ground for the suggestion that both its emergence and its continuance are the outcome of a 'mindlike reality', which began and sustains the non-determined processes underlying the fundamental laws of the universe in order to obtain a valued state.[33] The strength of such a suggestion is that it makes the emergence and continuance of the universe, as we know it, much less improbable than it would be otherwise.

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[27] Ward, p.295.

[28] Ward, p.296.

[29] Ward, p.296.

[30] Ward, p.296.

[31] Ward, p.297.

[32] Roger Penrose suggests that the probability of the emergence of a universe such as ours is 1 in 10 to the power of 123, a number too big to be written down. Ward, *God, Chance and Necessity*, pp.43-44.

[33] Ward, *Religion and Creation*, pp.297-298.

It has been suggested that it might reasonably be held that the orderliness of the universe can be accounted for in theistic terms. We have also seen that there is a general faith in the orderliness of the universe that far outstrips our knowledge of it. These two findings taken together may provide some justification for the view that the general faith in the orderliness of the universe arises from an intuitive awareness of a supreme being exhibiting personal qualities such as will and agency. Such an awareness might give rise to faith in the orderliness of the universe, in as much as it includes an awareness of the all-pervasiveness of the divine presence, and the sense that the divine confers purpose on the material universe. The argument here is simply a development of a point that the scientist and philosopher Michael Polanyi makes, he argues that:

> The discovery of objective truth in science consists in the apprehension of a rationality which commands our respect and arouses our contemplative admiration; that such discovery, while using the experience of our senses as clues, transcends this experience by embracing the vision of a reality beyond the impressions of our senses, a vision which speaks for itself in guiding us to an ever deeper understanding of reality.[34]

Polanyi's argument is that scientific progress is guided by the intuition of a rationally ordered reality. It seems plausible to think, from a theological point of view, that what is, in fact, intuited by the scientist is not only a rational order, but a presence exhibiting purpose and will which conveys order on the natural world. If this is accepted, it confirms that Oman's argument from the intuition of the orderliness of the universe supports the view that there is a general intuition of a divine presence and not of an undifferentiated holy or a sphere of the ideal.

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[34] Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1958), p.5.

S2 The Nature of Religious Belief

Oman's account suggests that the primary sense in which we must speak of religious knowledge is in terms of the meanings by which individuals seek to interpret the supernatural which they encounter in their everyday experience. This is a strong thesis which helpfully focuses up several features of religious belief, and also illumines some important facets of the nature and task of theological discourse.

S2.1 The Meaning of 'Meaning'

The trouble with 'meaning' is that there are various meanings of 'meaning'. There are two broad senses in which the concept may be used.[35] It can refer to the semantic definition of a word, or it can refer to the meaning of an event, situation, entity, or life. Clearly, Oman uses the concept in this second sense. Hick defines the general use of 'meaning' in the following way:

> We can [...] define meaning as the perceived (or misperceived) character of an object or situation such that to perceive it as having that character is to be in a distinctive dispositional state in relation to it.[36]

Hick, in his description of 'meaning' is true to Oman's use - this is not surprising given the fact that he has freely acknowledged his debt to Oman. Hick's definition highlights one of the most important features of Oman's use of 'meaning', that in assigning a meaning to an environment an individual is establishing both an intellectual and practical relation to that environment. The assigning of a certain meaning to an item or state of affairs defines how that item or state is understood and the practical disposition which a person bears towards that item or state. Hick also points out that there are different levels of meaning which can be given to the environment, though these interact with each other. In Oman's view these are interpretation of the given and the interpretation of the supernatural sphere, for Hick they are the physical, the socio-ethical and the religious. According to Hick, the relative degree of freedom which a person has in assigning a meaning varies depending on the type of interpretation which

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[35] John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, (London: Macmillan, 1989), pp.129-130.

[36] Hick, p.131.

is being given. Thus, in the interpretation of the physical world a person is largely constrained in the interpretations which they can give for these are shaped by material realities. Whilst, at the level of religious interpretations there is a great deal of freedom, for they are undetermined by experience.[37] That Oman was aware of this facet of the assignment of meaning is clear from his recognition that the verification of the meanings assigned to the natural world are more decisive than those given to the supernatural. Again, Hick notes that since meanings determine dispositions they are constantly being tested as practical hypotheses, he writes:

> All cognition is a tentative grasping of meaning on the basis of which we act, thereby confirming, developing or refuting our cognitive hypotheses.[38]

Once again Hick draws our attention to an aspect of Oman's use of meaning.

S2.2 Knowledge as Meaning

One aspect of Oman's argument, that all environment is known as meaning, is that knowledge arises from the active engagement of the knower with reality. This epistemology gains plausibility from the work of Michael Polanyi, who argues that even in the physical sciences knowledge is 'personal'.[39] By this Polanyi means that the generation of knowledge in the sciences is grounded in: the personal intuition of the orderliness of nature - which provides the basis for and guides the scientist in the formulation of theories; the intellectual passion of the scientist, which ensures that the scientist strives responsibly to transcend his own subjectivity in order to give an adequate account of the reality which is his concern; the tacit scientific skills developed through years of training, which enable the scientist to test his theories; and scientific judgement or connoisseurship, again the product of a period of training and again tacit, which allows the scientist to make decisions concerning the best way to test theories and the

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[37] See Ward, *Religion and Revelation*, pp12-15, for a discussion of the reasons why religious interpretations proliferate.

[38] *Interpretation*, p.132.

[39] Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*.

significance of test results.[40] Polanyi's work offers a convincing case for a critical realist position in relation to the physical sciences. If knowledge in the physical sciences, which are often held up as a model of objectivity, is dependent to a great extent on the activity of the knower, then this lends credence to Oman's view that there is a significant 'human coefficient' in knowledge as a whole.

S2.3 Religious Belief as Tentative

In that religious meanings are active interpretations of environment, it follows that religious interpretations are, according to Oman, logically tentative though they are, practically speaking, accorded a degree of certainty. This is an illuminating view of religious faith, firstly, because it points up the tentativeness with which every attempt to discuss and describe the supernatural reality must be held, and, secondly, because it recognises that religious meanings condition action.

That religious interpretations are logically tentative is an insight which follows from Oman's view that there is a 'personal coefficient' in all knowledge of environment. The implication of this viewpoint is that there is no way of knowing finally whether one's religious interpretations are wholly adequate representations of the reality to which they point, for critical realism holds that there no neutral vantage point from which to compare one's interpretations with the reality as it is. Thus, religious interpretations can never be more than the most adequate which are currently available to the individual. Moreover, since Oman holds, what appears to be the plausible view, that the sacred reveals itself progressively as men and women strive to understand and respond to it, this means that religious interpretations are inherently tentative in a way in which interpretations of the 'natural' are not, for the 'natural' is a given while the supernatural is constantly unfolding.

The tentativeness of religious interpretation is confirmed by the extent to which there is a marked 'personal coefficient' in the way in which Christians use the Bible - this is of critical importance in so far

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[40] For a discussion of Polanyi's work from a theological point of view see Trevor Hart, *Faith Thinking* (London: SPCK, 1995), pp 50-54.

as the Bible is the primary means of access to the primal divine disclosures which lie at the root of the Christian Faith. It may be suggested that the exegetical meaning which is assigned to the biblical text is the product of an interpretative process which is deeply influenced by the values and background knowledge of the interpreter. Thus, for instance, in the exegesis of the Bible the values and basic beliefs of the interpreter will be of great importance. If interpreters hold the Bible to be the inspired and infallible word of God, then it likely that they will attempt to interpret particular texts according to the so-called analogy of faith: they will interpret the text as one part of a consistent whole, the Bible. On the other hand, if one treats the Bible as an inspired but essentially fallible collection of literature, then it is likely that one's interpretations will show great sensitivity to the putative idiosyncrasies and novel ideas which distinguish the books of the Bible. Again, the exegetical meaning given to the biblical text is tentative in so far as it will vary according to the range and quality of the background information available to the interpreter. The critical study of the Bible has shown that the meaning of the biblical text can only be established through knowledge of the cultural, historical, formal and linguistic background of the text. It follows that the interpretation of the biblical text is a deeply complex matter allowing for many plausible differences of opinion. Moreover, in that the understanding of the historical and linguistic background of the Bible is constantly growing, it follows that putative interpretations of biblical texts must always be regarded as tentative.

S2.3.1 Religious Belief as Practical Certainty

Oman's analysis helpfully points to the in-built tension which exists, as a matter of fact, in the assigning of religious interpretations: logically they are, as we have seen tentative, but practically they are or must be, as the basis for action, touched with a degree of certitude. Moreover, Oman suggests that authentic religious faith ought self-consciously to embrace the tentativeness of its interpretations, finding in this embrace the motivation to explore further the mystery of the supernatural. But, for Oman being self-conscious of the tentativeness of religious interpretation ought not to lead to scepticism, that is it should not render the believer incapable of committing himself to a way of understanding and to the way of life implied in her understanding of the environment. Rather, faith, as Oman understands it, involves humility in facing up to the limits of one's knowledge, the assigning of religious meanings reflecting an

inquiry marked by honesty and integrity, and the courage to live in the light of the insights which one has currently attained.

On Oman's account, believers commit themselves practically even though they are aware that their interpretation of the environment may prove, in due course, to be inadequate. Such a practical commitment is not however irrational; there is ample justification for believers acting in such a way. Firstly, critical realism suggests that in principle there is nothing to distinguish the epistemological position of the person who acts on the basis of religious beliefs, and the scientist who acts on the basis of scientific theories. In both cases, there is a personal coefficient and this means that in neither case is it possible to claim with any absolute certainty the full adequacy of one's knowledge. If it is the case that all empirical knowledge is logically uncertain - though amongst putative knowledge there is bound to be greater and lesser degrees of probability - then it may be argued that the uncertainty of religious knowledge does not in itself justify scepticism.

Secondly, believers are right to commit themselves to their beliefs in that they have a high degree of certitude that a sacred realm does exist. To be a believer is to feel sure that a sacred realm is disclosed in human experience. Though religious beliefs may be held tentatively, yet there is a high degree of certitude that a sacred realm does exist to which religious beliefs relate. This certitude justifies religious believers affirming and acting upon those beliefs which they believe most adequately express the nature and significance of the sacred.

Thirdly, believers are justified in their practical commitments in that intrinsic to religious belief is the demand for commitment. Religious belief, in the Christian sense, does not present itself as something which can be held neutrally or sceptically until convincing evidence comes along leading to a more complete commitment. Rather, religious belief presents itself as a demand for commitment and change: Jesus' first sermon is summed up in the words 'Repent and believe the good news'! Moreover, as William James has pointed out, the issues which religion deals with, such as the possibility of eternal life,

are so pressing that it is perfectly rational to commit oneself to religious belief and practice even in the absence of compelling evidence.[41] Again, if Oman is right that religious commitment is a means by which one will gain greater insight into the religious sphere, it follows that commitment may be the only way of properly assessing the veridicality of religious beliefs.

S2.4 Religious Belief as the Assigning of Meaning

It is arguable that Oman's understanding of religious belief throws much light on the religious faith of ordinary Christians, for it seems to capture the highly individual nature of religious belief. It appears clear that religious beliefs are not generally defined by the official beliefs of churches; membership or association with a Church is no indicator of commitment to the official beliefs of the institution for there is a complex thicket of reasons why people become and remain church members. This leads on to the observation that the religious interpretations espoused by individuals will typically be idiosyncratic, reflecting their own personal history and their interaction with diverse belief systems.[42] The highly individual and idiosyncratic nature of religious belief is partly explained by the fact that religious meanings are underdetermined by experience. Moreover, in a pluralistic culture where people are exposed to a variety of religious ideas, and where there is no general attempt to compel people to follow a particular set of religious beliefs, the tendency to highly individual forms of religious belief is exacerbated.[43] It is, of course, possible, even in a highly pluralistic society, to trace common features in the religious meanings which people place on their environment. Most likely, if a society has had a historically dominant religious tradition the influence of that tradition will permeate out widely and affect the religious interpretations even of those who have no formal link with religious institutions - the outcry in the UK press at the advocacy by Glen Hoddle of reincarnation is evidence of this phenomenon. But for all that there are common patterns of belief, a salient feature of religious faith is that it is highly

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[41] William James, 'The Will to Believe', in *The Rationality of Belief in God*, ed. by George I. Mavrodes (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1970), pp.161-183.

[42] Ward, *Religion and Revelation*, p.43.

[43] Ninian Smart makes the point that the encounter with religious traditions other than one's own may tend to create the awareness of the tentative nature of all religious faith. Moreover, the realisation of the lack of certainty that attaches to faith can engender an approach to religious matters which is exploratory. Ninian Smart, 'Models for Understanding the Relations between Religions', in *Inter-Religious Models and Criteria*, ed. by J. Kellenberger (London: Macmillan, 1993), pp.58-64 (p.63).

individual reflecting, as Oman suggests, the individual's search for a way of integrating their experience as a whole.

S2.5 Belief and Practice

Understanding religious belief as meaning also emphasises and clarifies the intrinsic relationship between belief and practice. In as much as religious belief involves the assigning of a religious meaning to the environment, and since such an act defines a certain disposition to act, so there is necessarily an intrinsic relationship between interpreting the environment in religious terms, and the propensity to act in terms of that understanding. Of course, the particular actions which a religious interpretation promotes and the degree to which these actions are realised will depend on the particular interpretations held and the intensity with which these are held as against other non-religious meanings. Moreover, Oman's suggestion that ideally a religious interpretation of environment will represent an honest and persistent search for the truth concerning the supernatural, may suggest a psychological reason why religious belief ought to find expression in a distinctive practice. For, if a person 'owns' their faith as the outcome of a personal search for truth and as representative of the most profound insight that they can presently achieve into the this most important matter, then, ceteris paribus, it is likely that their religious faith will find clear expression in their actions.

S2.6 Religious Belief and Human Freedom

Oman's treatment of religious belief suggests that it is a 'vital' part of the human search for freedom; this is one of the most valuable aspects of his approach. Oman, as has been seen, argues that human beings are at best autonomous. But though Oman values the exercise of autonomy as an essential aspect of moral personality, yet he is clear that the mere absence of compulsion does not constitute the full expression of human freedom – Oman criticises the Enlightenment on this point. For Oman, human freedom is fully expressed and moral personality developed through the free application of all the capabilities of the individual in the search for truth, beauty and goodness, and by a commitment to respond to the environment in terms of the understandings developed. That is, human beings would be wholly free if they were able freely and responsibly to respond intellectually and practically in an

appropriate way to their environment; freedom is slowly attained as progress is made towards this unattainable goal. Further, in that the supernatural represents the 'higher reality [which] is seeking to reveal itself to us through our whole experience in this present world', and in so far as this higher reality 'is calling us to participate in its life', it follows that the quest for veridical religious interpretations of the environment is of fundamental importance for the attainment of human freedom.

S2.7 The Nature and Task of Theology

In that, according to Oman's account, thought is an integral aspect of the assigning of meaning, it follows that theological reflection is nascent in all religious interpretations of environment; Hart's words are apposite:

> Faith - when it is truly faith rather than a mere intellectual assent to some proposition or other - will always seek to enter into a fuller and deeper knowledge and understanding of that which matters most to it.[44]

An implication of Oman's view is that theology as a discipline is to be understood as a self-conscious, sophisticated, systematised and intensified version of that which is integral to all assigning of religious meanings to environment. It follows that the purpose of theological inquiry is, on the one hand, to enable the theologian to establish greater insight into the supernatural for himself - as Baillie argues, theology is firstly a personal quest - whilst, on the other hand, the theologian offers help to other Christians in their personal quest by suggesting plausible ways of interpreting the supernatural in the light of the Christian tradition and the witness of experience as a whole, and by themselves modelling the attitude which promotes success in the spiritual quest.

Oman's account suggests a theology that is both confessional and revisionist. It is confessional, in that it aims to fructify the faith of Christians and, in part, it must achieve this through the exploration and clarification of the basic commitments and values expressed in the typical beliefs and practices of

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[44] Hart, p.3.

Christianity. [45] Theology is also necessarily revisionist, for the ultimate commitment of faith is to the truth regarding the supernatural and not to any specific ways of describing that reality.[46] This means that theologians and Christians in general must be willing to look critically at the official beliefs and practices of their churches and traditions. A revisionist theology, as suggested by Oman's work, will seek to:

> Provide reasons for faith, in becoming aware of and responding to alternatives and criticisms; in articulating basic beliefs and recontextualizing them in relation to developing knowledge.[47]

Moreover, Oman's commitment to a revisionist theology is underpinned by his view of revelation as progressive. From Oman's point of view, since the divine is being progressively disclosed in human history, it follows that the need to fundamentally revise Christian tradition is not only a possibility but a necessity. Ward details some of the implications of such an approach, he writes:

> One is not trying to sit loose to traditions; but one cannot be satisfied with seeing a tradition as an unchanging, fixed set of irreformable beliefs. Rather, one seeks to extend one's tradition as it encounters new understandings and situations, both continually going back to its resources and looking forward to its applications in very different contexts. Pluralism (in the sense of a conversation of differing viewpoints) and revision (in the sense of imaginative rethinking in new contexts) become part of the intellectual framework of such a theologian.[48]

According to Ward, one essential element in a revisionist theology is the commitment to a conversation with the many different voices of the present and the past. Oman would agree with this, for he insists that in the religious life generally, and in theological work in particular, the religious interpretations which are put forward must be consistent with an honest appraisal of the supernatural as it discloses itself through experience in its entirety. The aim of such a process is greater insight into the supernatural, through the extension of 'the process of reflection' into the meaning of the Christian

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[45] Ward, *Religion and Revelation*, p.31; Hart, pp.3-4.

[46] Ward, *Religion and Revelation*, p.46.

[47] Ward, p.31.

[48] Ward, p.47.

gospel for contemporary men and women.[49] But in so far as the contours of the conversation are always necessarily changing - for there is constant development in human experience and in our perspective on the past - so the conclusions which are reached from the conversation with human experience are always provisional.

There is much to commend in Oman's twin emphasis on theology as orientated towards the cultivation of faith through a rigorous and critical search for truth. Firstly, Oman's work suggests a bold and positive view of the nature of faith and theology. F.R. Tennant, in reviewing the *Natural and the Supernatural* comments that 'it presents an argument to the effect that religion [...] is presupposed in natural knowledge and is determinative of the progress of human culture'.[50] Whereas often the view of religion in relation to the wider culture is that it is at best reactive and at worst reactionary, it is refreshing to encounter Oman's work which self-consciously wishes to think of faith and theology as exploratory and forward looking. Secondly, Oman's work is commendable in its emphasis on the freedom of the Christian and the theologian in relation to official Church beliefs and practices, for, as Smart notes, some religious (and theological) traditions display very unfortunate features,[51] and the freedom of the theologian to relate critically to the theological ideas current in his own tradition or the tradition of others is of great value, for truth is best served, as Karl Popper has taught us, by the 'open society' of free intellectual inquiry.[52]

S3 The Individual and the Community

From the account of Oman given thus far, it is possible that the impression may have been gained that he understands religious belief in highly individualistic terms. That is, it is possible to misconstrue Oman's

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[49] Ward, p.33.

[50] F.R. Tennant, 'Review of The Natural and Supernatural', *Mind*, 41, pp.212-218 (p.213).

[51] Smart, p.63.

[52] Ward, *Religion and Revelation*, p.45.

work, and to think that he is arguing that the authentic religious believer is a 'tradition-neutral investigator, free from all prejudice, able to judge with supreme rationality' how the supernatural can be most adequately understood and responded to.[53] However, though it is the case that Oman tends to stress the responsibility of the individual to establish his own interpretations of the encounter with the supernatural, yet it would be wrong to think that he is oblivious to the communal context in which religious meanings are established and developed. It is, in fact, arguable that Oman's theological method and his idea of revelation imply, or at least suggest, a rich understanding of the role of the Christian and wider community in the assigning of religious meanings by the individual.

S3.1 Oman's Theological Method

It is a noticeable characteristic of Oman's understanding of theology and faith, that he implicitly affirms a number of basic values and beliefs which together may be said to form a paradigm which informs and guides the exploration and interpretation of the supernatural. Thus, for instance, he takes the belief that the world belongs to and is ruled by a God of love as the axiomatic key for understanding the purpose of human history.[54] Again, he argues that the belief that God acts to bring all to the truth, but does so in such a way as to respect human freedom, is a basic postulate of faith and any theological endeavour.[55]

The full implication of Oman's tacit acceptance of the need for the Christian and the theologian to interpret the environment within a given framework of basic beliefs and values, becomes evident when one considers that such beliefs and values are not self-evident intuitions, but the product of the cumulative attempts of Christians over a period of 2000 years to understand the nature and purposes of the divine in the light of Christ. Moreover, they represent, in the main, the attempt to understand the divine in the light of Christ as he is mediated by the scriptures, especially the New Testament scriptures, which are themselves representative of a complex hermeneutical process in which the primal revelation of God as found in the experience of Jesus has been interpreted and reinterpreted.[56] Thus, by his

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[53] Ward, p.47.

[54] MacLeod, *John Oman as Theologian*, p.352.

[55] NS, p.347.

[56] Ward, *Religion and Revelation*, pp.218-221.

acceptance of the need for the theologian to operate within a framework of basic beliefs, Oman is implicitly accepting that the individual's search for religious meanings goes on within a pre-commitment to the established conclusions of the Christian community or at least part of it. This means that, in general, the freedom of the individual to develop novel ways of interpreting the supernatural is somewhat constrained and guided by the basic beliefs and values which underpin the religious quest of the Christian; the innovative role of theology, as far as Oman is concerned, would seem to involve the revision of those beliefs which are not logically foundational to the tradition as a whole. In turn, this reflects the fact that in a religious tradition, such as Christianity, all religious beliefs cannot be treated as being equivalent in the matter of the degree of certitude which they accrue, for some beliefs and values are logically fundamental to the beliefs and practices of the religion as a whole. Thus, for instance, the belief that God acts in history appears to be one of the most basic assumptions of Christianity, for it is assumed by prominent beliefs of the Church, such as the incarnation, and by characteristic practices, such as prayer, so that if it were to be rejected it is difficult to see how the structure as a whole could survive.

The logical pre-eminence of some beliefs of a tradition is reflected in the fact that they are part of the tacit framework of beliefs which believers will accept relatively uncritically, as long as they choose to be a participant within a religious tradition. Individuals may, of course, criticise and reject paradigmatic beliefs, but where this occurs it is not only certain beliefs which are being rejected, but the tradition as a whole within which the beliefs play a constitutive role. This is not to say that the paradigmatic beliefs of a religious tradition never change - history shows that it is possible for a religious tradition over a period of time to give up, adapt or reorder putatively fundamental beliefs and values in the light of changing circumstances and concerns. But it is arguable that whilst certain basic beliefs of a religious tradition may be altered with little loss, yet there are other beliefs which may not be altered if the tradition is not to implode into incoherence. Thus, for instance, some might wish to argue that Cupitt's non-realism undermines the fundamental structure of the Christian faith, and, as such, it is an illegitimate development from a Christian point of view.

Not only does Oman implicitly affirm the relative certainty of some beliefs, his work indicates that he holds that such theological innovation as is possible involves building upon the insights of others. That this is so is clear from the understated erudition which underlies Oman's writings, which may be taken to suggest that he sees theological development as going on within the context of a conversation with other religious and non-religious thinkers such as Schleiermacher,[57] Ritschl, McLeod Campbell, Erskine, Lotze, Ward and Sorley.[58] Oman holds that the Christian and theologian must take the insights of past and present thinkers seriously, and that the process of establishing religious meanings must begin within a conversation with these.[59] But he also holds that the Christian must be willing to look critically on tradition and the insights of others, and to revise accepted understandings where this is necessary, he writes:

> One of the greatest and most difficult labours is to carry on the work of our predecessors without being burdened by it, and to inherit it without being fettered.[60]

S3.2 Oman's Understanding of Revelation

Oman holds that religious knowledge consists of the interpretation of and response to the natural environment in terms of the supernatural. Further, he holds that all men and women including Jesus, the Apostles and the writers of the Bible are in the same epistemological position when it comes to acquiring knowledge of the divine.[61] That is, knowledge of the divine nature and purposes is gained, not through the arbitrary and abstract disclosure of information, but through the disclosure by God of his nature and purposes within and through what look like the normal processes by which knowledge of any environment is gained: through the honest search for appropriate ways of understanding and relating to the not-self. One account, consistent with Oman, of how revelation can be given through the normal processes of human thought and inquiry is that put forward by Ward, he writes:

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[57] Alasdair Heron suggests that Oman's theology is "an attempt to pursue but also to improve on what Schleiermacher had suggested". Bevans, *John Oman and His Doctrine of God*, p.38.

[58] Bevans, pp.32-40.

[59] Bevans, p.40.

[60] 'Schleiermacher', p.403.

[61] John Oman, *The Paradox of the World* (Cambridge: CUP, 1921), p.129.

> It [revelation] can [...] be seen as arising out of specific situations, out of a perceived bringing of one's concerns, purposes, and values before God in a context of worship and prayer, so that they clarify in a particular way. This clarification might then be seen as the 'guidance of God'.[62]

One implication of Oman's account of revelation is that, like other forms of knowledge, religious meanings must be somewhat shaped by the community of which the individual is part. That is to say, if God discloses himself to individual men and women who are honestly searching for him, and if, as seems plausible, the possible ways in which particular individuals think about the world is largely shaped by the conceptuality, concerns and doxastic rules which pertain in the society and sub-cultures of which they are part, it follows that the meanings which individuals may assign to the supernatural will be commensurate with the concerns, rules and conceptuality of their society, Ward comments:

> Instead of thinking of God [...] as breaking into a human framework, ignoring it completely, and giving direct Divine knowledge, it seems more plausible, and more in keeping with the actual history of religions, to think of God as communicating within the framework that societies have themselves developed.[63]

One dimension of a community's influence over the individual's construction of meanings is to do with the rules governing the granting of prima facie justification to beliefs. According to William Alston, within established religions and communities tacitly held criteria - criteria which individuals internalise through a process of socialisation - are operative which guide individuals in their interpretation of their experience[64] and the formation of the particular beliefs through which they articulate that experience.[65] Alston argues that in a religious tradition the criteria which will shape the interpretations which individuals give are such as the need for beliefs which have internal consistency; the need for beliefs which are consistent with well-established religious 'facts'; the need for beliefs which are supported by a wide range of high quality evidence; and the desirability of beliefs which are fruitful in suggesting new perspectives and solutions to long standing conundrums. Such criteria, according to Alston, shape the

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[62] Ward, *Religion and Revelation*, p.215.

[63] Ward, p.24.

[64] Alston is particularly interested in the perceptual beliefs which are formed in relation to mystical experiences, but his work is applicable to broader notions of experience such as that utilised by Oman.

[65] Alston, *Perceiving God*.

individual's interpretations in such a way as to predispose them to the formation of beliefs which will enjoy prima facie justification within a religious tradition.

Clearly, Oman's work does not contain anything resembling Alston's analysis. But it is arguable that Oman's understanding of revelation may lead to the suggestion that the individual's insights into the supernatural - which are generated through the coming together of God's gracious action and the inquiring mind of the individual - are inevitably influenced by the doxastic rules, thought forms, modes of expression, and the tacit connotations and resonances which characterise a society or sub-culture.[66] Moreover, this conclusion need not clash with the assertion made earlier that there are concept-free disclosive feelings, for the contention is simply that when it comes to the reflective interpretation of experience, concepts and doxastic rules come into play.

Conclusion

It has been argued that Oman's suggestion, that religious belief arises in response to a feeling of awe which discloses the supernatural, helpfully clarifies the nature of the sense of the presence of God. The possibility of Oman's thesis was established through the analysis of the concept of feeling, with reference to the work of Alston and Macquarrie. This analysis suggested that feelings can disclose states or entities which are part of the not-self, and this argument has been underpinned by the rebuttal of Madges and Proudfoot, who argue that there is no uninterpreted awareness. The empirical work of Damasio and the philosophical analyses of Dretske and Reid have suggested that feelings can precede and condition concepts; that feelings can disclose states or entities; and that reflective thinking often involves the attempt to specify that which is known firstly through feelings of one sort or another. These conclusions, along with those of Chapter Five, have helped to establish the plausibility of Oman's view

[66] Ward, *Religion and Revelation*, p.24.

that the supernatural is firstly known through an a priori felt awareness which may be characterised as a feeling of awe.

Whilst it is possible to hold that the supernatural is disclosed through a feeling of awe, it has been argued that it is inadequate to argue that that which is, in the first instance logically speaking, disclosed is the undifferentiated holy. This argument has been criticised, firstly, because it clashes with the conclusions of Chapter Five, that there is an a priori awareness of a presence which may be described in personal categories. Oman's account is also vunerable to Katz's argument that the phenomenology of religious experience does not seem to support the thesis that there is one experience of the divine underlying all religions. Again, arguably Oman's undifferentiated holy stands in tension with his own basic axiom that the divine must always be analysed in terms of the concept of the personal. Finally, it has been tentatively maintained that one of the arguments which Oman deploys to sustain his view of the root experience underlying all religion, may, in fact, support the view of Chapter Five that there is a general awareness of a presence which exhibits 'personal' characteristics such as consciousness and agency. That is, the conjunction of the general faith in the coherence of the natural environment, and the fact that the orderliness of nature can be plausibly accounted for in theistic terms, may underpin the argument that there is a general implicit awareness of the dependence of the material universe upon the divine.

Oman's work, it has been argued, throws much light on the nature of religious belief and its relation to theology. Understanding religious belief or faith as the individual's assignment of meaning to the environment emphasises the personal coefficient of religious knowledge. This insight has led on to the observation, borne out by the evidence of how the Bible is understood, that religious understandings are inherently tentative. On the other hand, Oman correctly suggests that it is a feature of religious interpretations that whilst they are logically tentative, yet they are held for practical purposes to have a degree of certainty. It has been suggested that this facet of religious faith is not a concession to irrationality, but a rational strategy not least because all knowledge is tentative, and the issues with

which religion deals are so pressing that one simply cannot wait for certainty before committing oneself to religious faith.

Understanding religious belief as the assignment of meaning is also useful in that this view captures the highly individual nature of religious belief. Whilst the freedom which people have in assigning meanings to the physical world is curtailed by the relatively coercive nature of the human experience of the physical, this is not the case with the assignment of religious meanings. Since people are relatively free in the assignment of religious meanings, religious belief has to be understood as a highly individual matter.

Again, Oman's conception of religious faith as the assignment of meaning confirms and clarifies the close relationship between the intellectual and the practical in the religious life. Oman's work is particularly helpful in suggesting the possible psychological dimension of the intrinsic relation between the intellectual and the practical: if a religious interpretation reflects, in Polanyi's terms, the passionate and responsible commitment of the believer to the truth, then it is likely that the believer will respond to the environment in terms of this interpretation.

Oman's view of religious faith throws light on the nature of theological discourse. It suggests that theological thinking, in a general sense, is intrinsic to faith, and that academic theology represents an intensification of that which is integral to faith. In this view, theology is undertaken for the purpose of fructifying faith, it is necessarily confessional. On the other hand, theology must stand in a critical relation to accepted understandings of the supernatural, for it is exploratory and progressive and this reflects the progressive nature of revelation.

Whilst the emphasis of Oman on faith as the assignment of meaning is a fruitful one, yet there is a danger that he may be interpreted as offering a highly individualistic account of religious belief. Such an interpretation would have roots in the emphasis which Oman places on the responsibility of the

individual to discern for himself the meaning of the supernatural. The possibility of such a misunderstanding of Oman, and the fact that he does not perhaps give full expression to the communal dimension of belief, has necessitated the attempt to develop Oman's work by articulating what is arguably implicit in it. It has been shown that both Oman's theological method and his understanding of revelation suggest that he was, at least tacitly, aware that, so long as an attempt is being made to understand the supernatural from a Christian point of view, the individual quality of religious interpretations is set within the context of the acceptance of certain basic beliefs, values and doxastic rules.

Chapter 8

Comparisons and Conclusions

This chapter has two tasks. In the first place, it will be argued that an analysis of the discussion of Macmurray, Baillie and Oman suggests that they share a similar underlying approach: they each adopt a functional and experiential account of religious belief, though, of course, their accounts differ significantly on points of detail. Secondly, the threads of the study will be drawn together in a conclusion which will include some suggestions as to the value of the thesis as a whole.

S1 A Functional and Experiential Account

The study of Macmurray, Baillie and Oman has provided the basis for claiming that they share a functional and experiential approach to the analysis of religious belief. That is, each of them tries to understand religious belief in terms of its function in bringing about some valued state which is regarded as both the will of God and essential to human flourishing. Their accounts are experiential in that they suggest that religion arises in response to the awareness of a valued state in experience, and that it seeks to promote the realisation of the valued state by throwing new light on that which is disclosed in experience, namely the valued state.

That Macmurray, Baillie and Oman share a similar account of religion can be sustained by a consideration of some of the details of their work. Moreover, the plausibility of arguing that each

approaches religion from within a functional and experiential perspective is enhanced in so far as such a thesis makes possible an integrated view of each of their accounts as a whole.

S1.1 Macmurray and the Search for Fellowship

The idea of a 'valued state' plays a central role in Macmurray's thought. He argues that the analyses of the development of children and of agency both show that there is within immediate experience a nascent awareness of the absolute value of fellowship. In relation to the development of children, Macmurray holds that children are generally born into a relation characterised by self-giving love, and that their early development leaves them with an awareness that their happiness can only be found in such a relation. Moreover, Macmurray argues that the analysis of agency shows that the major problem inhibiting the freedom of the agent is that of establishing cooperative relations with other agents; that is to say, the analysis of agency shows that human beings are aware that fellowship is the necessary condition of human freedom.

Macmurray sees religion as arising in response to and for the sake of fellowship. It arises in response to fellowship, in that it is a reflective effort initiated by the dual awareness of the necessity of fellowship and the precariousness of community. Macmurray argues that religion arises out of this dual awareness in order to preserve, reinforce and extend community: the ultimate end to which mature religion strives is the establishment of a universal community.

The functional view that Macmurray has of religion conditions his view of religious belief. The first thing to note is that the relative importance that Macmurray gives to religious ritual, as against belief, is consistent with his emphasis on religion's function as regards community. In so far as religion exists for the sake of community, those aspects of religion which most directly promote communal feeling will be of primary importance. Again, Macmurray's specific view of the role of religious belief is also consistent with his having a functional view of religion. Macmurray argues that religious belief has a twofold role in relation to the preservation and extension of community; it is an open question - which

we cannot address here - whether these two roles are compatible. Firstly, Macmurray holds that religious belief aims to articulate the personal in universal terms; it does this primarily in its symbolic articulation of the idea of a personal God. As the articulation of the personal, religious belief heightens awareness of the need for fellowship, identifies some of the aspects of the personal and pinpoints some of the barriers to fellowship; in these ways it plays a functional role in relation to community by heightening awareness of the personal realm.

Secondly, Macmurray holds that religious belief engenders community by its capacity to image the universe in personal terms. In this regard religious belief is a kind of transcendental deduction from the established knowledge that the self is a knowing agent. Religious belief is a postulated statement of the metaphysical nature of the universe as it must be in the light of human agency and knowledge, this is the implication of Macmurray's argument concerning the 'personal universe'. The postulation of a personal universe engenders community both in the sense that it is the necessary postulate of the possibility of human fellowship - if people could not act and know, which is for Macmurray the implication of thinking of the universe on a mechanical analogy, there could not be fellowship as Macmurray thinks of it - and in the sense that the belief that history is unified by the act of a personal God who is bringing about universal fellowship cuts through the fear that destroys community.

Whilst it is correct to distinguish between the two roles which religious belief plays for Macmurray, it is also important to stress that these two roles are two modalities of one task. The overall task of religious belief is to engender fellowship by deepening the awareness of the personal character of reality as a whole. This task includes the attempt to show that the personal character of human life is consistent with and dependent upon the personal character of the universe as a whole.

In that Macmurray propounds a functional role for religious belief, it is natural for him to argue that religious belief may be tested or verified in practice. If religious belief has the practical function of engendering fellowship, then it is reasonable to assess particular formulations of belief in terms of their

capacity to achieve this aim. Underlying this view is the presupposition that religious beliefs may be treated analogously to scientific theories. Just as all scientific theories are held tentatively[1] and receive only a measure of confirmation through active experimentation, so religious beliefs also are tentative and require confirmation in action.[2] An example of the kind of general confirmation which Macmurray believes a religious belief might receive is found in his discussion of the doctrine of the incarnation. According to Macmurray, this doctrine may be treated as an authentic statement of faith, in so far as it is part of the articulation of the personal character of God and the universe.[3]

S1.2 John Baillie: Willing Obedience as a 'Valued State'

According to John Baillie religion arises logically out of moral experience, not as an inference from one thing to another, but as a 'deeper way of reading the experience [moral] itself and drawing out what is already there'. This general account of religion suggests in itself that religion has a functional relation to the intuition of obligations and this, it will be argued, is an illuminating way to understand Baillie's account of religion as a whole.

The key to understanding Baillie's thought, it can be argued, lies in his analysis of moral experience. According to Baillie, in moral experience there is the intuition of moral obligations such as that it is better to love than to hate, and there is also the intuition that 'lasting peace and blessedness' can only be gained through willing obedience to the intuited moral demands. Thus, according to Baillie, implicit in moral experience is the recognition of a valued state: at the heart of moral experience lies the awareness that willing obedience to our moral intuitions is the state that will make for human well-being. Moreover, a religious insight is that in pursuing this valued state a person is offering obedience to God, for the moral intuitions which are intuited arise from an encounter with God.

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[1] John Macmurray, 'The Function of Experiment in Knowledge', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 27 (1926-1927), 193-212.

[2] John Macmurray, 'Objectivity in Religion', in *Adventure: The Faith of Science and the Science of Faith*, ed. by B. Streeter (London: Macmillan, 1927), pp.177-215.

[3] Macmurray, 'Objectivity in Religion', p.203.

That Baillie adopts a functional view of religious belief can be established with reference to several dimensions of his work. One relevant aspect of his work in this regard is his discussion of faith. Baillie takes the view that faith is a mode of apprehension by which the general self-revelation of God is apprehended. He argues further that there are two dimensions to faith. It is, on the one hand, trust in the veridicality of the mode of apprehension, and, on the other, it is trust in the veridicality of that which is disclosed, which includes a propensity to act in terms of the disclosure.

Baillie holds that faith is an apprehension, analogous to sensory awareness, of the divine self-disclosure. What this actually means is that faith is, in essence, the responsive apprehension of the obligations which arise out of an awareness of God's goodness, truth and beauty. That this is the case is clear from Baillie's discussion of 'anonymous Christians'. In arguing that there may be anonymous Christians, Baillie asserts that the person who recognises and acts in terms of moral intuitions is exercising faith. This implies that that faith is, at core, the apprehension of the moral demands of the divine and the promises which are attached to these. Faith, as it is demonstrated by the anonymous Christian, is the apprehension of these obligations and the willingness to respond to these in token of their intrinsic rightness. That this is an accurate presentation of the implications of Baillie's view that there may be anonymous Christians, is confirmed by the fact that, on account of his views at this point, acute commentators such as H.D. Lewis accuse him attenuating the concept of 'faith' by failing to distinguish adequately between faith and morality. My contention is that Lewis is right to the extent that Baillie sees faith in terms of obedience to obligations. Lewis' accusation slightly misses the point, however, in that Baillie sees obedience to moral intuition as an implicit religious response.

If faith, in essence, is the recognition of and an attitude of willing obedience towards the obligations laid upon all by God, it seems likely that religion and religious belief must find their function in the fructification of willing obedience to divine demands. That this is indeed how Baillie sees the matter is confirmed by his discussion of the Christian frame of reference. According to Baillie, the core insight of the Church in the light of the Christ Event is that God calls all to a new way of life (of feeling, acting and thinking) which is patterned around loving fellowship with God and humankind. In Baillie's view, the

primary means of expressing love for God is through serving others. In this sense, it might be said that Baillie understands the central Christian message to be, that all are called to willing obedience to the religious and moral obligations which God lays upon them. Moreover, Baillie argues that the Christian frame of reference is a paradigm by which Christians interpret the meaning of their whole experience. This is to say, religious beliefs such as are found in the Christian frame of reference are seen by Baillie as functioning so as to draw out that which is latent in experience. In so far as the Christian frame of reference is so clearly concerned with cultivating a willing response to the demands of God, it can hardly be doubted that Baillie sees its function as deepening the interpretation of moral experience. The Christian frame of reference can be thought as a deepening of moral experience in the sense that it gives a theistic context to moral intuitions, and broadens the awareness of the obligations which all bear towards God. That is to say, in that Christian belief points to the source of moral obligation in God, so it unfolds a richer understanding of the range of obligations, religious and moral, which are laid upon men and women. Moreover, in that religious belief gives moral experience a cosmic setting, so it intensifies the awareness of the validity of the obligations of which we are aware. In this sense, religious belief gives greater imaginative force to the intuitive awareness of the rightness of responding willingly to moral intuitions. These ideas are reflective in the following words of Baillie:

> Religious faith begins in the conviction that, in doing my duty, I am doing what is in the nature of things *expected* of me, filling a place that has been somehow *appointed* me to fill, and so putting myself in line with the Eternal purpose of things. This sense of appointment or of - vocation cannot, however, support itself apart from the belief that the universe is not only alive, but also , at the heart of it good; and thus the sense of duty rises through the sense of vocation to the sense of the presence of God in our lives. What Christianity does is, on the basis of a new-found moral insight, to deepen in our minds the meaning of goodness, and to tell us that God is *love*.[4]

The view that Baillie has a functional view of religious belief is also consistent with his discussion of the verification of religious belief. Baillie holds that religious beliefs may be verified according to whether they have consequences consistent with the Christian frame of reference. That is, religious beliefs may, in part, be tested according to whether they promote willing obedience to the moral and religious duties which are constitutive of fellowship with the divine and human realities.

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[4] John Baillie, 'The Idea of Orthodoxy', *The Hibbert Journal*, 24 (1926), 232-249 (p.246).

S1.3 John Oman and Moral Personality

One of John Oman's convictions is that experience shows that God's purpose in engaging with humankind is the nurturing of moral personality. On-going development of moral personality, according to Oman, is the 'valued state' which is the will of God. It is in the light of this assertion of Oman's, that it is illuminating to argue that his view of religion is that it is functionally related to the development of moral personality in individuals.

Oman holds that humans qua humans are autonomous beings. That which differentiates human beings from other creatures is that they are, as individuals, able to interpret the world for themselves, form their own intentions and act independently of others. But autonomy in itself is not the 'valued end' which Oman is concerned with. Rather, for Oman the full expression of moral personality is found in the honest attempt of individuals to orientate themselves to think, feel and act in ways appropriate to the ideal realm of which all are aware. There are, according to Oman, two obligations which are integral to the intuition of the ideal sphere and which shape moral personality and its development. Firstly, the expression of moral personality requires that individuals live in terms of their deepest insights into the supernatural. That is, there is the obligation to live with integrity. Secondly, since every predication of truth, goodness and beauty points beyond itself to the true, the good and the beautiful, so part of the expression of moral personality is found in the on-going, sincere and rigorous quest for deeper insights into the mystery of the supernatural; this is the 'attitude which faces in the direction of right verdicts'.[5] Thus, the valued state which Oman is concerned with is that of the individual expressing his true being through exercising his autonomy in thinking, acting and feeling in ways that he is convinced are appropriate to the supernatural, and in aspiring to ever greater insights into the supernatural which will be the basis of more appropriate ways of living within the supernatural realm.

A consideration of Oman's understanding of theology confirms that he sees religious belief as functionally related to the development of moral personality. One salient feature of Oman's account of theology is that he does not think of theology as being primarily concerned with the establishing of

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[5] NS, p.207.

truths regarding the transcendent that will be binding for all. Rather, for Oman the task of theology is that of stimulating individuals to respond to their intuition of the supernatural and the challenges which are part of this intuition, namely to think and live in terms of the progressive disclosure of the supernatural in the natural.[6] Theology, according to Oman, encourages the expression of moral personality in at least two ways. Firstly, theology and the history of religious discovery in general (which includes, for Oman, the Bible and tradition) may suggest insights which will help the individual come to a convincing interpretation of her experience.[7] Theological ideas, public religious beliefs and the history of religious discovery in general are important, but only as guides which may stimulate the individual in her search for religious meaning and they do this by suggesting possible ways of interpreting the 'deepest meaning' of the natural, that is, of interpreting the supernatural as it discloses itself in the natural. Secondly, Oman argues that an important facet of studying the religious history of humankind is that in it are found the accounts of spiritual pioneers who exemplify the attitude which makes for progress in the spiritual quest. In this regard, Oman argues that one of the important significance's of Christ is that he is a supreme example, both to the ordinary Christian and the theologian, of the attitude which will enable the interpretation of the 'higher realm of possibility, which is essentially a world of freedom in larger truth and more far reaching aspiration'.[8]

For Oman, the attitude which corresponds to the divinely imposed obligation to seek out truth, beauty and goodness is sincerity. Sincerity is the courageous desire to interpret the environment in terms of its witness to itself, which is to say the sincere person seeks to interpret the environment as it is. Such a commitment to truth requires courage, for it involves the individual eschewing 'average opinions and conventionalities' and facing up to the provisionality of all moral and religious knowledge. Moreover, the sincere person seeks to live in terms of their insights into the supernatural, and looks for confirmation of their insights as they seek to live in terms of them.[9] One way in which an insight may be confirmed is if the attempt to live in terms of it leads to profounder insights into experience. The sincere

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[6] Method, pp.91-92.

[7] VA, pp. 7-9.

[8] Method, p.92.

[9] NS, p.204.

person will be willing to put their insights to the test, and will be ready to give up a certain interpretation if the environment is not responsive to it in a practical sense. For Oman, religion and religious belief aim to cultivate sincerity of this sort, in so far as sincerity is the quality that which marks the person who is seeking to give full expression to their moral personality. The sincere person is the individual who thinks, feels and acts autonomously to the end of interacting responsibly with the ideal sphere of which she is aware.

S1.4 Some Further Comments

The discussion of the common functional and experiential approach of Macmurray, Baillie and Oman has suggested several further insights into their work. One feature of their work is that they interpret the importance of religion and religious belief in terms of the achievement of, to use Baillie's phrase, a way of life: a way of thinking, acting and feeling. None of the three thinkers construes religious belief as primarily an attempt to describe transcendent realities. On the other hand, whilst all three of the writers locate the ground of religious belief in individual experience, yet all of them think of religious belief as cognitive. Thus, for Macmurray religious belief is both the symbolic representation of human personality and the articulation of metaphysical truths. In Baillie's view, religious belief in attempting to interpret moral experience aims to delineate the cosmic setting of moral intuition. Oman likewise argues that in probing into that which is putatively disclosed in the sense of the holy the religious person aims to identify the nature and purposes of the divine. Thus, for all three thinkers religious interpretations aim, through the exploration of experience, to disclose facts concerning the human condition and the metaphysical context in which human life goes on. One implication of this is that whilst all three offer experiential accounts of religion, yet they cannot be classified as belonging to Lindbeck's 'experiential-expressive' model of religious belief, in that thinkers who belong to this 'type' are said to regard beliefs as expressions of 'inner feelings, attitudes and existential orientations',[10] they are concerned to understand religious belief as concerned with the interpretation and transformation of the inner life of the individual.[11] In contrast, the account given by Macmurray and the others suggests that since religious

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[10] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, p.17.

[11] Alister E. McGrath, *A Passion for Truth* (Leicester: Apollos, 1996), p.71.

belief aims to articulate and interpret experiences which are putatively amongst our most direct openings onto the environment, then a primary aim of religious belief is to fructify our knowledge of the environment. In this sense, the case of Macmurray, Oman and Baillie points to a limitation of Lindbeck's typology in so far as he tends to suggest that an experiential account is, by definition, not concerned with facts. The matter here is of some importance because Lindbeck's account has become very influential, and because, if it were true that an experiential account by definition takes a non-cognitive view of religious belief, this would, for many, severely undermine the plausibility of such an account. For, generally speaking, the cognitive role of religious belief is of great importance to religious believers.[12]

S1.4.1 The Use of the Analogy of the Personal

Another interesting insight which arises out of the discussion of the common approach of Macmurray, Baillie and Oman, is that whilst each utilises the concept of the 'personal' understood in terms of categories such as mutuality, each applies a different emphasis in their use of the analogy of the 'personal' in discussing God and his relations with humankind. In Oman's case, for instance, his interest in using the analogy of the personal is to emphasise that God relates to human beings in a non-coercive way. Again, Baillie primarily utilises the idea of the personal to stress that the intuitive awareness of moral obligations arises within an encounter with a personal being exhibiting self-consciousness, the capacity to reveal himself in action, and will. The idea of mutuality is not so important for Baillie as it is for Oman, for Baillie thinks of the relation between God and human beings in terms of dependence and obedience. Finally, since Macmurray wishes to argue that the idea of God is partly the symbolic representation of human personality, he goes further than either Baillie or Oman is arguing that the relation between God and humankind must be understood in terms of the relation between human beings. Macmurray's more radical application of the analogy of the personal is reflected in his argument that in so far as human beings begin to act in terms of the ultimate value of community, so do they enter into community with God in that they and he together are cooperatively involved in building a universal

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[12] Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), p.109.

community in history. The criticism of Macmurray that he fails to distinguish between the human and the divine is itself testimony to the radicalness of his use of the analogy of the personal.[13]

S1.4.2 Individual Experience

Another feature of the experiential account of religion as presented by the three thinkers, is that they locate the ground of religion in certain dimensions of the experience of individuals. But, this does not mean, as Alister McGrath maintains, that the experiential approach necessarily suggests that religion arises in response to the 'idiosyncratic emotions or existential apprehensions' of the individual.[14] Rather, Macmurray and the others argue that religion arises from some fundamental forms of experience which are part of the experience of all individuals.

S1.4.3 Religious Belief is Articulated at the Communal Level

It has been noted that all three writers root religious belief in universal experiences of the individual. This does not mean, however, that they argue that religious belief is primarily articulated at the individual level. Rather it can be held that their work leads us to hold that religious belief is primarily articulated at the communal level and that the individual will affirm and creatively relate to religious beliefs in so far as they throw light on his experience.

Whilst Macmurray takes note of the role of the individual in the development of religious belief, for, as with all reflective activity, the development of religious beliefs must involve individuals going beyond the given through creative acts of imagination, yet it is also clear that for Macmurray religion is irreducibly a communal activity. This flows from the purpose of religion as the celebration and strengthening of community. From this it can be inferred that the articulation of religious belief is primarily a communal

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[13] John A.T. Robinson, *Honest to God* (London: SCM, 1963), pp.52-53.

[14] McGrath, pp.74-75.

function, and this view is consonant with the role of religious belief as the articulation of the awareness that 'we belong together in a common life, and we are glad of it.'[15]

It may be argued that Baillie also regards religious belief as primarily articulated at the communal level. This is clear from his twofold recognition that the individual's awareness of the sense of the presence of God is arrived at within a communal context. Firstly, he argues that the Christian ought to interpret the sense of the presence of God within the Christian Frame of Reference. Secondly, he talks of the way in which the development of Christian belief is constrained and guided by the degree to which the Christian community confirms or refutes a particular interpretation.

Oman also holds that religious belief is primarily articulated at the communal level. This is what was argued in Chapter Seven, where it was said that Oman's work implies that the individual interprets the value and nature of the divine in terms of the basic values, beliefs and doxastic rules of the Christian community, and, indeed, the concepts and doxastic rules of the general community in which the Christian is set. In this sense, Oman's stress on the importance of the individual exercising independence with regard to religious beliefs may be read as his attempt to stress that each individual Christian ought to interact creatively with the religious beliefs of their community. That is, the Christian exercises faith by seeking to contribute to the development of the understanding of experience in ways commensurate with his abilities.

S1.5 Some Strengths of the Approach of Macmurray, Baillie and Oman

Not only has the study shown that Macmurray, Baillie and Oman share a common perspective, it has also shown that their approach is a valuable one. In particular, it has been seen that their approach draws our attention to and articulates the logic of some important facets of religious belief and believing.

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[15] RAS, p.57.

S1.5.1 Belief and Practice

In that Macmurray, Baillie and Oman understand the primary importance of religious belief as lying in its functional relation to a valued end, so they establish an intrinsic link between belief and religious and moral practice. In this sense their functional account of religious belief grounds the analysis of religious belief as a form of 'belief in'. A functional account of religious belief suggests that Christian believing must be a form of 'belief in', in that it emerges out of and for the sake of a valued end which is regarded as the will of God. In this regard, a functional account of religious belief is an important corrective to the inadequate and harmful view that religious belief is primarily a matter of assenting to propositions describing transcendent realities.

S1.5.2 Belief and the Vitally Important

Consistent with the view that religious belief arises out of everyday experience, is the insight that it is concerned with the exploration and resolution of matters which are both universal and pressing: vital matters for all. This is a strength of the experiential approach to religion for two reasons. Firstly, it helps us to understand why religion, and Christianity in particular, engages the interest of so many and why people are willing to affirm Christian beliefs and act in terms of these. This point can be made in another way. If Christianity and religion in general are not rooted, at least partly, in everyday aspects of our experience, then it is hard to explain how they 'ever begin to engage our interest'.[16]

Secondly, the experiential account of religion leads to the attractive and plausible view - a view which informs Baillie's book *Invitation to Pilgrimage* - that in the presentation of the Christian Gospel the task is that of analysing and clarifying the common strands of experience to which the Gospel relates and showing how the Gospel can make sense of these. Macmurray's work, it has been suggested, is a good example of how apologetics operates so far as this model is concerned. He analyses and clarifies the common aspiration to human togetherness which is associated with the impulse to human well-being, and he shows in a powerful way how the Christian idea of fellowship may provide a most satisfactory way of creatively responding to this common intuition.

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[16] David Brown, *Continental Philosophy and Modern Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), p.2.

S1.5.3 The Metaphysical Impulse

All three writers argue that religion is, in one part, the search for the theoretical and practical integration of experience as a whole, and it has been affirmed that the 'metaphysical impulse' is indeed an authentic religious aspiration. It is a strengths of the experiential account of religious belief that it is highly consonant with this basic religious impulse. For, if religious belief is seen as arising from an awareness of something of ultimate value which is an integral part of experience as a whole, then it follows that there will be a natural tendency on the part of religious people to seek to interpret and integrate experience from the point of view of that which discloses, as they see it, the deepest meaning of experience in its entirety. For, the view that religion arises from experience as a whole implies that the task of religion is to inform experience as a whole with a religious understanding. Part of the matter here is that the experiential account of religion assumes that human experience is basically trustworthy and that what is needed is not the negation of experience but a more profound exploration and understanding of what experience discloses.

One interesting confirmation of the consonance of the experiential account of religion with the metaphysical impulse is seen in Baillie's understanding of the place of theology in the university. According to John McIntyre, Baillie's emphasis on the disclosure of the divine in, with and under all dimensions of the material world led him to affirm that God is 'known in those fields in which other disciplines operate'.[17] In this sense theology is not alien to the world of the university, for theology aims to give an integrating context to all searches after knowledge and, indeed, may sometimes give a complementary or even an 'alternative interpretation of phenomena already within the range of those other disciplines'.[18]

S1.6 A Qualification

Whilst it has been argued that the general approach of Macmurray, Baillie and Oman is a valuable one, it must be borne in mind that, as was indicated in Chapter One, their approach cannot be taken as an

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[17] Quoted in Cheyne, *The Baillie Brothers*, p.22.

[18] Cheyne, p.22

exclusive hermeneutical key by which to understand Christian belief and believing. That Oman, Baillie and Macmurray tend to do this is indicated by their tendency to interpret the importance of the 'Christ event' in terms of its value for throwing light on the interpretation of experience. Macmurray does this by claiming that Christ points the way to a true interpretation of human nature and fulfilment; Oman likewise claims that Christ's importance, in large part, is that he exemplifies a sincere attitude towards experience; and Baillie also argues that the importance of the Christ event is that it enables us to identify a paradigm within which to understand that which we experience. No doubt there is much truth in what the three writers have to say, in the sense that Christians will tend to hold that the life, death and resurrection of Christ do throw much light on experience as a whole. But - and this is where the perspective of the three writers may be limited - for Christians, the encounter with Christ through scripture, tradition and the presence of the Spirit is not regarded as only significant for the light it throws on experience, rather, the encounter with Christ seems itself to be the ground of their faith and that which shapes their faith. In this sense, the experience of Christians generally mirrors the experience of the earliest Christians, Schillebeeckx comments:

> It began with an encounter. Some people - Aramaic - and perhaps also Greek-speaking Jews - came into contact with Jesus of Nazareth and stayed with him. This encounter, and what took place in the life of Jesus and in connection with his death, gave their personal lives new meaning and new significance. They felt that they had been born again, that they had been understood, and this new identity found expression in a similar solidarity towards others, their fellow-men. This change in the course of their lives was the result of their encounter with Jesus, for without him they would have remained what they had been.[19]

The experience of Christians, suggests that the analysis of Christian belief has to allow that there are two modes of experience which inform such belief. It is, as has been argued, illuminating to think of Christian belief as arising in response to aspects of experience in general. But equally important, the analysis of Christian belief must also allow that belief arises in response to the encounter with Christ which is, itself, dependent upon the discrete primal disclosures to Jesus and the early Church. It may be argued that these two perspectives are not exclusive but mutually enriching.

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[19] Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ: The Christian Experience in the Modern World* (London: SCM, 1980), p.19.

S1.7 Some Points of Contrast

Whilst it is possible to argue that Macmurray, Baillie and Oman develop a similar approach to religion, it is important to recognise their differences as well. The most obvious difference between them is that each of them accounts for religious belief in terms of a different aspect of experience. Macmurray holds, that religion arises from the 'problem of the personal', Baillie, that it is a response to moral intuition, and Oman contends that it arises from the feeling of the holy disclosed through the material world.

S1.7.1 The Character of the Datum of Religious Belief

Another difference in the account of the three writers is to do with the nature of the experience which is said to underlie religion. Macmurray and Baillie both imply that religion arises on the basis of an awareness of an unvarying property of reality. Macmurray, for instance, argues that all religion arises from the awareness of an impulse to freedom and community. Since this awareness is tied up with the nature of the self as agent, it follows that it must be a uniform awareness throughout history. For Macmurray, the task of religion is to express and reinforce this universal impulse. Jesus is seen by Macmurray as the 'complete unfolding' of the Hebrew religious consciousness, in so far as he fully comprehended the nature of God's purpose in history, which is to say, that he understood fully the unvarying conditions of human freedom.[20]

Again, Baillie also argues for the view that religious belief aims to articulate an unvarying aspect of experience. This is reflected in his argument that the primary contact with the divine is found in unchanging moral intuitions, and that religious belief aims to articulate the divine being who is encountered primarily as unconditional demand.

In distinction to Baillie and Macmurray, Oman accounts for religion in terms of a dynamic aspect of human experience, for him, religion relates to a progressive disclosure of the divine. By this, Oman means not only that there is a progressive recognition of the divine nature and purposes, but that God

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[20] CH, pp.54-55.

reveals himself progressively through history in a way commensurate with the human search for him and with the conceptual development, knowledge and concerns of particular historical communities. Oman's emphasis on the progressive revelation of the divine implies that, on the one hand, God is involved in on-going revelatory activity, and, on the other, that, in principle, we must expect to discover new insights into the divine purposes which will render redundant parts of the Christian tradition as it has come down to us.

It may be argued that Oman's understanding, that the datum of religious belief is dynamic in character, is to be preferred to the rather static accounts offered by Macmurray and Baillie. Each of the writers makes use of a personal analogy in trying to understand the relation between God and humankind. One insight drawn from this model, is that persons reveal themselves progressively through acts of self-revelation. In considering the work of Macmurray and Baillie, one feels that their idea of an unvarying disclosure of the divine nature and purposes falls somewhat short of the interpersonal model, and that Oman's view is more consistent with it. Moreover, Oman's view is also sustained by the empirical observation that the radical developments in Christian belief over history are more consistent with Oman's 'progressive model of revelation' than they are with a more static understanding of how the divine discloses itself. It can be argued that doctrinal developments, such as those represented by the ordination of women, are not so much the outcome of the Church hearing more clearly what the divine has always been saying, than that they are examples of the Church, or parts of it, discerning a new message.

S2 Conclusion

This study has attempted to contribute to the literature on Macmurray, Baillie and Oman by an exposition and critical assessment of their accounts of the ground and nature of religious belief.

S2.1 The Expository Moment

The exposition of Macmurray, Baillie and Oman has moved forward on two fronts. There has been the straightforward unpacking of their respective accounts in turn. There has also been the attempt to establish that they belong to one theological type, and to the extent that this is a plausible argument it may illuminate important aspects of their work.

S2.1.1 Macmurray

The chapters dealing with Macmurray have shown that his account of religion is firmly grounded in his distinction between immediate and reflective experience. For Macmurray, religion is a form of reflective experience, and it is derivative of immediate experience. In particular, religion arises in response to the problem of the personal - the problem of the alienation of persons from one another - and its function is the establishment, reinforcement and extension of community. The function of religious belief is twofold. It aims to interpret human experience in a way consistent with human agency and knowledge, which is to say, that it articulates the personal character of the universe as a whole, and encourages the exocentric patterns of motivation which are constitutive of community. Again, religious belief contributes to overcoming the problem of the personal through enabling awareness of the problem and its solutions, and through the symbolic representation of the universal features of personality.

S2.1.2 Baillie

John Baillie's account of religion is grounded in his analysis of religious experience. For Baillie, the logically primary form in which God is encountered is in moral intuition. Moreover, according to Baillie, all intuit moral obligations, and, this is to say, that all have at least a primitive form of faith - which is the mode of apprehension by which God's self-revelation is apprehended. Religion arises as the attempt to deepen the awareness of that which is encountered in moral experience. In particular, religious belief aims to draw out the theistic context of moral intuition, and widen the awareness of the obligations, religious and moral, which all people stand under. The core Christian contribution to the interpretation of the religious experience of humankind, is the insight that God calls all to participate in loving fellowship with him and others. Faith for the Christian is a way of life characterised by loving

fellowship with the divine and human, and this way of life is regulative of Christian belief. That is, in a general sense, Christian beliefs may be verified according to whether their practical impact is consistent with and strengthening of the Christian way of life.

Baillie holds that specific Christians beliefs which are helpful interpretations of religious experience are such as the belief that religious experience is, in fact, the encounter with a personal God exhibiting consciousness, will and the capacity to act. In characterising such beliefs, Baillie argues that they can be thought of as derivative of the knowledge by acquaintance which is had in religious experience proper. Since religious beliefs are derivative reflections on experience, they are tentative in a way in which intuitive knowledge is not, though some concepts, such as the concept of the 'personal', may be applied univocally to God for they are proper to him in that they arise, logically speaking, from the a priori encounter with God.

S2.1.3 Oman

John Oman argues that all enjoy religious experience, in the sense that there is a universal experience of a supernatural realm - the realm of the ideal - which reveals itself across human experience of the natural - the material - as a whole. Oman argues that one indication of the existence of the supernatural is the tendency to predicate intrinsic forms of valuation, for such predication suggests an awareness of the sphere of the good, the true and the beautiful against which items and states are compared. Religious experience, for Oman, involves passive and active elements. The supernatural is directly encountered in a felt awareness of the holy, but as with all environment it comes into focal consciousness through active interpretation involving evaluative and intellectual processes. In Oman's view, part of all religious experience is the awareness of the greatness of the supernatural, and this awareness is constitutive of the obligation to seek deeper insights into the supernatural and to live in terms of one's insights.

Religion, for Oman, arises out of religious experience and its role is to deepen our apprehension of that which is disclosed in human experience, the supernatural. Religion, in this sense, is directly a response

to the obligation laid on every human being to discover deeper insights into the unfolding mystery of the supernatural and to live more appropriately in response to the supernatural. Oman's stress in discussing religion is on the responsibility of the individual to discover religious meanings which are, for them, convincing interpretations of experience. Religious beliefs, in the wider sense of the public beliefs of the Christian tradition, are only signposts which may or may not help the individual in their quest. Oman stresses that one of the most important lessons which may be learned from listening to the views of others and learning about their religious questings, is that of how to best go about one's religious search. He emphasises that a developed sensuousness, an independent mind and, most of all, an all-pervasive sincerity are the qualities most likely to make for progress in the spiritual journey. It is through exercising these qualities that human beings express and develop their moral being, and since God's purpose in dealing with humankind is the development of moral personality, it follows that religion and religious belief are primarily concerned with promoting individual moral development.

S2.1.4 The Comparative Analysis

The comparative analysis in Chapter Eight has augmented the expository work done on each of the three thinkers. In comparing the three writers, it has been suggested that they share a functional and experiential approach which underlies and animates their work on religion. From this perspective, Macmurray, Baillie and Oman understand religious belief as functioning so as to bring about a valued state variously conceived of as community, willing obedience to God, and the active expression of moral personality. Moreover, religious belief primarily fulfils its function by enabling a deeper awareness of that which is disclosed in experience: the absolute value of fellowship, the demands and promises of a personal God and the obligation to pursue deeper insight of and a more adequate practical response to the supernatural. A corollary of the perspective of the three writers, is that each of them affirms that religious belief must be tested according to whether it enables the valued end to which it relates.

The expository value of the thesis that Macmurray, Baillie and Oman share a common approach may be judged by the degree to which it illuminates the interconnections between the different parts of their accounts, and guides the way to fresh insights into their work, and it has been suggested that, indeed,

the thesis does highlight some important dimensions of their work. In this regard it has been pointed out that the three writers see religion as concerned with strengthening a way of life; that they think of religious belief as both grounded in experience and yet cognitive; that they apply different emphases in their use of the analogy of the personal to describe the God-human relation; and that they think of religious belief as grounded in individual experience though also having an important communal component. Again, the comparative analysis has highlighted the differences between the three writers so far as their understanding of the datum of religion is concerned.

An aspect of the comparative analysis of Macmurray and the others, is that it has helped in the identification of the strengths of the general approach which they adopt. One claim has been that their approach underlines the intrinsic relation between the affirmation of religious propositions and the disposition to act in terms of these. Their approach also helps to explain why religion engages the interest of so many and in this way it provides a basis for the development of a Christian apologetic. One dimension of a Christian apologetic might be the attempt to develop a perspective which would seek to integrate experience as a whole. One of the strengths of the approach of Macmurray, Baillie and Oman is that it motivates and makes possible such an endeavour.

S2.2 The Critical Moment

The critical assessment of Macmurray, Baillie and Oman has been aimed, primarily, at evaluating the worth of their individual contributions to the discussion of the ground and nature of religious belief, so far as Christianity is concerned. However, in that they belong to one theological type, the critical discussion has had implications for the assessment of the plausibility of that their general approach. Further, the discussion of Macmurray and the others has generated certain specific conclusions with regard to the 'religious belief'.

S2.2.1 Macmurray

The discussion of Macmurray found that his distinction between immediate and reflective experience is a valuable one when it comes to the analysis of religion, but that his argument that there is only immediate experience of the material sphere is an illegitimate limitation, in so far as religious people often hold that it is possible to interact with a suprasensory realm.

So far as Macmurray's claim that there is an awareness of community as a valued end within immediate experience, I have argued that whilst he is right to hold that agency and knowledge presupposes a relation to the personal other, the claim that there is an awareness of and commitment to fellowship in immediate experience is questionable. Fellowship, as Macmurray understands it, is a Christian response to the problem of human alienation, not a valued end intrinsic to ordinary experience.

Macmurray's argument that religion can be seen as a response to some critical dimension of ordinary experience is an illuminating one. However, his specific contention that religion arises in response to the 'problem of the personal' will not hold so far as Christianity is concerned. As an alternative, it seems plausible to argue that Christianity be thought of as a response to the intuition of the divine across the whole range of experience. Again, Macmurray's contention that religious belief is primarily the articulation of intuitions and inclinations which are intrinsic to ordinary experience is also of limited usefulness. There are theological and other reasons for supposing that religious belief plays a more proactive role in relation to ordinary experience. In fact, religious belief, I have maintained, may be understood as a form of the locution 'belief in', which is to say, that theory is logically precedent to and determinative of practice, but that there is in an intrinsic relation between religious affirmation and the pursuance of religious and moral practice.

S2.2.2 Baillie

Baillie's argument that religion is grounded in the universal awareness of moral value has been closely scrutinised. There are grounds for holding that moral intuitionism is a plausible approach, however,

Baillie's contention that religion arises out of moral experience is suspect. In particular, the fact that moral seriousness can be self-sustaining or find sustenance in other forms of ethical theory undermines Baillie's argument. This conclusion highlights the need to distinguish between moral and religious experience, though there are, of course, close connections between the two.

Whilst Baillie's primary thesis is somewhat inadequate, I have contended that his work assists in the articulation of the thesis, that religious belief can be interpreted as arising in response to a direct encounter with the divine in experience. Drawing on Baillie's work, the view has been developed that religion can be seen as arising from an a priori awareness of a personal being, and that this awareness is analogous to that which we have of human persons. The awareness of the divine, it has been said, is universal, but this does not mean that all are focally aware of their awareness of the divine. Moreover, the plausibility of this thesis has been strengthened by the rebuttal of Katz's argument that religion is not a response to primary experiences of the divine.

S2.2.3 Oman

One aspect of Oman's account of religion which has been found to be useful, is his idea that the divine is, logically speaking, first disclosed through a feeling of awe. This argument is conceptually possible and plausible. There are empirical and philosophical reasons for thinking that feeling can be a mode of preconceptual disclosure. This being the case, if it is possible to defend the view that religion arises from a direct encounter with the divine, it is plausible to think that Oman may be correct in his assertion that religion arises from a feeling of awe.

Oman's argument that the encounter with the divine is, in the first instance, an encounter with an undifferentiated sphere has been criticised. In my view, Oman at this point falls prey to Katz's argument, that there is no unitive experience underlying all religion. Oman's 'undifferentiated holy' also sits uneasily with the contention that Christianity arises from an encounter with a personal being.

Moreover, the general faith in the orderliness of the universe can be part of an argument in support of the contention that there is a general implicit awareness of a personal divine being.

Oman's understanding of the nature of religious belief has been found to be most illuminating. His idea that all our knowledge of the supernatural is given as meaning, suggests that religious belief is to be understood as an active attempt to interpret that which is disclosed in feeling, and that religious beliefs are always logically tentative, though as a basis for action they accrue a degree of certitude. Again, Oman's idea of 'meaning' accurately conveys the sense in which religious belief is an individual matter - though he also recognises the communal context of the assignment of meanings; it also establishes the intrinsic relation between affirmation and practical response, and the 'vital' existential character of religious belief.

S2.2.4 The Critical Account

One feature of the critical assessment of the three writers, is that it has lent some plausibility to the functional and experiential approach which underlies their work. In particular, the attempt to rebut the arguments of Katz, Proudfoot and Madges, which purport to establish the impossibility of cognitively important, non-conceptual experience, has aimed at establishing the defensibility of the general approach of Macmurray and the others. Again, the defence of moral intuitionism augments the plausibility of the claims of Baillie and Oman - and my own claim - that it is possible to hold that religion arises in response to a non-conceptual experience of a suprasensory reality.

S2.3 Final Comments

The overall aim of this study, as it was stated in Chapter One, has been to make a creative contribution to the literature on Macmurray, Baillie and Oman. The study has sought to achieve this aim by striving to obtain a clear statement of the writer's views on religion and religious belief, through detailed analyses of the work of each and by a comparative analysis. Moreover, in so far as the study has achieved clarity of insight, it may make more general expository contributions to the study of the three

writers. In Macmurray's case, the study emphasises the fact that his is throughout a philosophy of religion. With reference to Oman, the thesis seeks to clarify the details of his complex epistemology. The discussion of Baillie, in that it arises from a sympathetic view of his general approach, is able to elucidate positively the virtues of his substantive work. In these ways, and possible in others, the study may have supplemented the recent work on the three writers.

One aspect of the expository work of the study has been the claim that Macmurray, Baillie and Oman belong to one 'type' which represents a defensible approach to religion. To the extent that this assertion carries conviction, it suggests that further study is needed better to establish the strengths, weaknesses and provenance of their approach. Especially intriguing is the question of whether, and in what sense, the three writers are representative of a distinctive Scottish approach to the analysis of religion.

Another way in which the study has sought to achieve its aims is through a sympathetic, critical analysis of the three thinkers on religion. The detailed analysis of salient features of their work has enabled the assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of their work. Moreover, the attempt has been made to mobilise the strongest insights of the three writers in articulating and establishing a series of theses regarding the ground and nature of religious belief. In this sense, the study has demonstrated the continuing value of the work of the three, and, perhaps, provided some of the elements of a more systematic treatment of the concept of religions belief.

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