

Biographical Note

Terence Michael Penelhum was born in Bradford-on-Avon, England, and educated at Weymouth Grammar School and Edinburgh University, where he graduated in 1950 with first class honours in philosophy. He was Alexander Campbell Fraser Scholar at Oriel College, Oxford, where he obtained the B.Phil. in 1952. For the next year he was English-Speaking Union Fellow at Yale University.

He taught philosophy at the University of Alberta, Edmonton, for ten years from 1953, and then at the University of Calgary, where he was head of department from 1964–70 and dean of arts and science from 1964–67. From 1978–88 he was professor of religious studies at Calgary, and he has been professor emeritus since 1988. He was director of the Calgary Institute for the Humanities for three years from 1976.

He has held visiting teaching appointments in the Universities of California, Colorado, British Columbia, Washington, and Waterloo; and a number of non-teaching visiting appointments in Great Britain. He has honorary doctorates from the Universities of Lethbridge, Waterloo, and Calgary, and from Lakehead University. He obtained the Alberta Achievement Award in 1987 and the Canada Council Molson Prize for the Humanities and Social Sciences in 1988.

He was married to Edith (née Andrews) in 1950. There are two children of the marriage, Rosemary Claire and Andrew Giles (deceased). He became a Canadian citizen in 1961.

H. A. Meynell

Introduction

H. A. Meynell

Terence Penelhum has distinguished himself in several areas of philosophy, notably the philosophy of religion, the question of personal identity and the problem of survival, and the work of David Hume. His work in general is characterised by the clarity and meticulous argument that is the glory and the boast of analytical philosophy, but it never falls into the triviality for which that kind of philosophy has an unsavoury reputation, unfortunately not always undeserved.

The philosophical problems that are involved in the knowledge-claims of religious believers, and in the rejection of these claims by sceptics, have been central to Penelhum's interests throughout his career. These familiar disagreements raise for philosophers general issues in the theory of knowledge, as well as particular problems associated with religion. (It is no wonder, then, that Penelhum has devoted a monograph to Joseph Butler, who is among the most sane and clearheaded of religious apologists, as well as to Hume, the arch-sceptic.) Many have alleged that in order to understand a religion, you have to participate in it. Penelhum objects that, although it is true that rejection of religion is often based on misunderstanding, it is quite wrong to infer that it must always be so. Believers and unbelievers, he insists, may agree not only on what it is that one party accepts and the other rejects, but even to some extent on what would resolve their disagreement.

Penelhum has been especially critical of the "parity arguments" used by some philosophers in defence of religion. It is notorious that we cannot "prove" the existence of an external world on the basis of our experience, or that of other minds on the basis of the noises and gestures that we perceive as being made by our fellow human beings. Since all the same we accept the existence of an external world and other minds as a matter of course, the argument runs, the believer may as well do the same thing with regard to the existence of God or

other essentials of her religious faith. Penelhum argues vigorously, to the contrary, that religious believers need arguments, ones that do not explicitly or covertly assume what they are supposed to prove, in support of their beliefs. He is not sanguine about the soundness of traditional proofs for the existence of God, though he does not rule out the possibility that new and more effective forms of such proofs might be found. And it is not impossible, as he sees it, that the historical credentials of some religious revelation might tip the balance in favour of its rational acceptability.

Christians and other theists have usually believed in some form of life after death. Although Christian theologians have generally insisted that we are to expect existence as reconstituted persons, bodies and all, in a restored creation, popular belief has often been rather in the survival of disembodied “souls” that somehow last through the death and dissolution of our physical bodies. There are two kinds of difficulty that attend belief in these doctrines. The first is the question whether it is logically possible to ascribe predicates to disembodied beings while still retaining anything of their original meaning. Persons as we are normally acquainted with them are, after all, material entities, even if of a special kind; in “thinking away” the bodily characteristics of persons as we know them, do we not perhaps think away persons as such? The second is the problem of personal identity. In what sense, if any, could one properly say that the allegedly resurrected John Smith was identical with the original? However close the resemblance in appearance, behaviour, and state of thought or feeling of the later specimen to the earlier, could that later ever amount to anything more than a copy or replica? Penelhum has subjected both problems to searching examination, and has concluded that the first is the more nearly intractable.

The essays collected in this volume reflect these interests. As John Hick sees it, religious experience occurs when a human being is open to the transcendent “Real” that is universally present and that is envisaged in many religions as a personal God. This experience comes to consciousness and expression through the concepts and symbols of the person concerned, which differ according to whether she or he is Muslim, Buddhist, Christian, or whatever. What is the essential difference between a religious and a naturalistic interpretation of such experience? Hick suggests that if the religious account is true, the universe is such that human beings are destined for a future that will not come about if a merely naturalistic account is correct. Each main religious tradition speaks of such an eschatological state in its own way. It is noteworthy that both religious and naturalistic

believers may in a sense be said to “walk by faith,” since either party may turn out to be wrong.

Such a naturalistic account of religious experience is definitely championed by Kai Nielsen, who contests the claim of William Alston that religious believers may, in a manner, perceive God. He insists that this cannot be so, at least so far as the developed God of Judaism and its daughter religions is concerned. There is no doubt that people who have what are called “religious” experiences commonly take themselves to be having experiences of God, rather as those who have visual experiences of certain colours and patterns take themselves to be seeing trees. Alston argues that they may be right to do so, Nielsen on the contrary that their supposition is not only false but in the last analysis nonsensical. The basic trouble is that God, as “an infinite individual transcendent to the universe, . . . could not possibly be directly experienced any more than someone could draw a round square or see a shapeless, colourless figure.” One has to distinguish between seeing, hearing, and so on, which provide us with knowledge of objects other than ourselves, and our affective response to these, which certainly does not supply us with such knowledge in the case of ordinary physical objects. Alston claims that they might do so in the special case of God, but does not appear adequately to justify this contention.

Basil Mitchell points out that there are significant secular analogies to those aspects of religious faith to which unbelievers are liable to take exception. In all matters of importance to them, human beings have to choose between competing ways of thought none of which can be shown to be true beyond reasonable doubt. It is not rational, or indeed psychologically possible, for us to be constantly changing our beliefs about these matters in accordance with every scrap of *prima facie* evidence that may turn up, since in this case our convictions would never reach the point of serious test, or enable us to develop consistent characters, or empower us to change things for the better. Total open-mindedness seems as undesirable an extreme as total dogmatism, especially when one bears in mind how easily social pressures that are by no means rational may masquerade as such. Mitchell writes:

We have an interest both in deciding which are the right goals to seek and in pursuing the chosen way resolutely. The latter requirement cannot be met if we are too easily persuaded that we are on the wrong track; the former requirement cannot be met if we refuse to heed any signs that we are going astray.

I take a more robust, not to say cruder, line in natural theology in trying to show that the principle of sufficient reason can be defended against the usual objections; and I go on to argue that the intelligibility of the universe, its apparent susceptibility through and through to rational explication of the kind exemplified by science, is best explained if it is due as a whole to an intelligent will such as has always been known as God. I defend this contention against some recent objections to it.

In his concluding remarks, Penelhum notes that what he calls the “basic belief apologetic” has been a prominent feature of recent philosophy of religion; this apologetic claims that lack of success in natural theology does not imply that theistic belief is irrational, since the requirement of foundations for all of one’s beliefs would impugn many that are taken for granted by everyone, like those in an external world and in other minds. Especially impressive is William Alston’s version of this argument, which seeks to justify theistic belief on the basis of mystical experience very much as belief in the external world is supposed to be justified by sense experience. However, one must admit the weight of Kai Nielsen’s objections to a close analogy between religious experience and sense perception, and the force of the conceptual problems that he points out in the notion of a transcendent being’s appearing to anyone. John Hick is to be commended for his direct confrontation of the difficulty posed for religious believers in the variety of religious beliefs and traditions. But one may wonder whether Hick does not underplay the degree to which the great religions are opposed to and criticize one another, and may question his claim that religion and naturalism are both properly to be regarded as forms of faith. And does not the theory that all religious traditions amount to responses to the Real that are through and through culture bound seriously compromise the participation of the individual in her or his own religious faith?

Basil Mitchell has provided what may well be the classic version for our time of the cumulative justification of religious belief, by the piling up of diverse considerations rather than the provision of a few knock-down arguments. No doubt, as he says in his contribution to the present volume, persistence in the face of evidential difficulty may be commended as sometimes leading to truth, and even to salvation; yet one may well feel that this is only the silver lining on a cloud. A person may incidentally come to apprehend many truths, and gain great psychological benefits, from false or even incoherent theories. Consciousness of ambiguity, of the equal possibility of defending rival views, can only undermine the assurance with which

one maintains the Christian or any other religious position. This leads to a greater need than ever for some form of natural theology, as I insist. Unfortunately, it is highly questionable whether my own efforts in this direction are at all successful. What puzzle remains once we admit that the evolutionist explanation of our beliefs as adapted to survival in our universe is quite satisfactory? Apparently, only the fact that our universe contains natural regularities, which is just the starting point for the old argument to design. But there is some question exactly what my argument is, just what my claimed grounds are for believing in a divine creative will.

The claim that miracles have occurred has often played an important part in religious apologetic. Alasdair MacIntyre focuses attention on that aspect of Hume's famous argument against miracles which is concerned with acceptance of testimony. He complains that Hume gives no compelling reason for adopting his principle that "the unprecedented character of some alleged event *must* outweigh *any* knowledge that we have of the integrity, honesty, intelligence, and sanity of those who testify to its occurrence." A philosophy of science that at once left open the possibility of the occurrence of miracles and did justice to the order of nature would have to justify rejection of three features of the usually dominant view of science, which in fact seem imposed on rather than derived from its discoveries. First, the sciences as conventionally understood are supposed to inform us not only of how nature is but of how it must be; second, they aim to leave no gap in our knowledge of nature and no room for anomalous events; and third, their accounts are expected to be such that what occurs at other than the basic physical level is explicable by what goes on at that level.

What is virtually the opposite complaint is made against Hume by Antony Flew. He maintains that factual, as opposed to logical, necessity and impossibility have been neglected by subsequent philosophers owing to the influence of Hume, whom they regard as having de-legitimized such notions. Hume's scepticism on the matter is traced to his Cartesian presuppositions, and his consequent view of "perceptions" as not necessarily involving contact with what is external to oneself. The justification of our causal conceptions is to be found in our activity as agents in a mind-independent world; human agency is and must be our paradigm case of causation.

David Fate Norton defends Hume against two criticisms. Penelhum has contested Hume's claim that Pyrrhonists cannot refrain from believing, and hence that they are unable to live in accordance with their scepticism. Myles Burnyeat charges Hume

with overlooking the fact that Pyrrhonists were quite happy with a passive and undogmatic acceptance of appearances, as opposed to fully fledged beliefs. Norton holds that both objections may be countered by attention to Hume's detailed account of the nature of belief and doubt. Hume held that belief and assertion cannot be suspended, and hence that the Pyrrhonian program is impractical. But he went on to outline a form of scepticism that "has modified the undisciplined doubts of Pyrrhonism" and that, while it is perhaps liable to attack on other grounds, does not fall foul of this particular objection.

Of Hume's *Natural History of Religion*, Annette Baier writes that it tries "to see what happens when we direct upon religion the very forces that it expresses"; when we show awe and respect for the awe, respect, and desire to propitiate that Hume finds to be at the base of religion. We are apt to be amazed at the religious opinions of other people; but the more we turn on our own faith the kind of attention to which we expose that of others, the less divisive our amazement will tend to be, and the more likely we will be to approach agreement on religious matters. The ideal in this area is to avoid dogmatism, to listen to objections, to admit uncertainty, and to be willing to revise one's opinions. Hume is not very sanguine, however, about the prospect of calm and sceptical religious sentiments eventually prevailing over bigotry and zeal. And he is sadly impressed by the fact "that strength of understanding and cultivation of mind give no security against false and absurd religious views."

As Penelhum sees it, Hume's inquiry into the natural history of religion turns out to be quite an "in-house" investigation on Annette Baier's account—as though Hume himself had the religious motives that he is subjecting to scrutiny. But this is surely a questionable interpretation of Hume, who seems rigorously to separate the reasons a sensible person might have for believing in a deity from the causes of religion as it actually exists. Alasdair MacIntyre is quite right to comment on the extensive parallels between the epistemological positions of Hume and Pascal; much of Hume's system of philosophy, including his treatment of religion, would appear to be a deliberate attempt to draw inferences opposite to Pascal's from a similar view of the human situation. As to miracles, Hume seems to be arguing, in spite of MacIntyre, not so much that they never occur, or that they cannot do so owing to the inexorable working out of natural laws, as that one could never have adequate grounds for assenting to the testimony to a miracle. While Hume's argument on this point does not seem to *depend* on the doctrine that every event falls under a natural

law, he certainly believed this to be so; Antony Flew's account of Hume's treatment of causal necessity is a great help in coming to grips with this structurally central element of Hume's system. One may agree with Flew, against Hume, in maintaining the libertarian position that we have power to do things that we are not caused to do, without sharing Flew's confidence that all of us know the truth of this as a matter of direct experience. As to David Norton's defence of Hume's mitigated scepticism, one may protest that Hume's recommendation that we should confine our attention to matters of science and common life, in forming our opinions, is strikingly arbitrary. Such a possibility is certainly livable; but it is another matter to claim that it is susceptible to principled defence.

In considering what kind of human survival of death might be conceivable without the postulation of a disembodied soul, Penelhum has made two controversial claims, as is pointed out by Jack MacIntosh. First, in certain cases that at least at first sight are readily conceivable, there is a range of choices about whether a person who is picked out by one set of descriptions is identical with a person who is picked out by another; second, such an identification can be made over gaps in space, time, and causality. MacIntosh argues, however, that "there are straightforward but unanswered arguments in favour of viewing the putative reincarnatees as *not* being identical with their supposed originals." The claim to memory is always false when the claimant was nowhere near the event remembered; so strong impressions as of memory, however veridical they may turn out to be, are not to the point. Again, descriptions of putative reincarnations always leave open the possibility that there might be more than one equally strong claimant to be the reincarnation of an individual who had lived at an earlier time; but this is logically impossible. "Given the disidentity of *b* and *c*, and the transitivity of identity, it is clear that *b* and *c* cannot both be identical with *a*."

The view that identity presupposes continuity is, on the other hand, strongly contested by R. T. Herbert. A play's performance, and therefore its existence, persists through intermissions; and one can surely have a headache that comes and goes. There are many cases where it is difficult unequivocally either to assert or to deny identity. Suppose a father accidentally knocks down the toy house of wooden bricks built by his little daughter, and builds the bricks up again into an exactly similar structure so that she will not know what he has done; is the resulting assemblage the same toy house as before? We would be inclined to say that an illegal weapon stripped down for

secret transport, and then reassembled, was the same weapon at the end as at the beginning of the process; but suppose the parts of the gun have been reduced in the interval to matchwood and to molten metal? Herbert concludes that it might conceivably be the case that “the concept of a human being, like that of the phoenix, is the concept of something whose existence encompasses both a dissolution without remainder and a rising to new life.”

The problem of personal identity is taken up once again by Andrew Brennan, who challenges Penelhum’s assertion that the notion of an unowned experience is senseless. He himself defends a version of Hume’s account of the person as a mere bundle of experiences, which he calls a “systems” conception of the person. Some persons who have suffered neurological injury, and consequent loss of memory, provide an illustration of how the bundle might come apart, as perhaps do others who undergo radical changes of personality through psychotherapy or religious conversion. Why should the unity attributable to a person be different in kind from that which we may ascribe, say, to an ecosystem or a game?

Geoffrey Madell questions a belief shared by Penelhum and MacIntosh, that “the body is . . . the unifying factor, holding together what would otherwise be loose and ownerless experiences,” a claim that, he notes, has led to denial of the possibility of disembodied existence. He insists that what unites a person’s experiences is simply that they are underivatively hers or his; “no other principle of unity is needed, or possible.” The fact is that persons are not mere objects, sheer elements of the objective order of things; consequently the intersubjectively available world cannot contain all that there is. In general, the gulf between mind and body is such that we have no conception of how to bridge it; the trouble is that we cannot see what it is for something mental, and therefore essentially intentional, to be linked with something physical, which essentially lacks this property.

A more hopeful attitude to the solution of this problem is maintained by William Lyons, who provides an overview of recent theorizing about intentionality. On one view, it is merely a feature of our common-sense vocabulary about the mental, ultimately to be replaced without remainder in a fully scientific account. Thus, according to Daniel Dennett, following Rudolf Carnap and Willard Quine, while for ordinary purposes there is no substitute for intentional descriptions of human beings (in terms of their beliefs, desires, and so on), to be properly scientific we should replace these with talk about the design of the brain, or its physics and chemistry. On a second view, which has arisen explicitly in opposition to the first, intentionality is

to be regarded as a real feature of the brain, albeit a linguistic feature; Jerry Fodor has made a sustained attempt to provide such an account, in effect by envisaging the brain as a computer. According to yet a third view, represented especially by Ruth Millikan, psychology should be envisaged as a branch of biology, so that an evolutionary explanation may be given of beliefs and desires. While it may look at first sight as though all of these approaches have proved dead ends, Lyons suggests that a way forward may be found by deriving insights from each of them.

Penelhum points out that, while hope for some form of afterlife seems quite essential to Christianity and other religions, the debates that have taken place in recent years about personal identity seem to increase the difficulties attending such belief. In particular, the coherence of the conception of disembodied survival has been subjected to quite devastating attacks. Jack MacIntosh's strictures against reincarnation can also be applied, as he himself remarks, to the apparently more promising doctrine of the resurrection of the body, which may be regarded after all as "the prediction of a one-time reincarnation into an eschatological state." The discussions of intentionality so usefully analysed by William Lyons may be felt to be dominated by questionable metaphysical assumptions of a materialist nature. While it is obviously true that our common-sense notions of what it is to be human, and so to "have a mind," evolved without the benefit of neurophysiological knowledge, it by no means follows from this that they are no better than rough-and-ready descriptions that do well enough for ordinary practical purposes, but cannot aspire to truth. And it may be wondered how far an account of the evolutionary origin and value for survival of our cognitive states can shed light on the nature of those states themselves. Andrew Brennan's arguments, resourceful as they are, seem to blur the distinction between the sort of personal identity that is a mere fact of life, and the kind that ethical and religious systems present to us as an ideal. Obviously, individual persons can lack identity in the latter sense; but does this have any bearing on their identity in the former? Mental breakdown and suicide are by no means the same thing.

The account of the unity of the person presented by Geoffrey Madell is in stark contrast both with that of Brennan and with the implications of the naturalistic notions of intentionality discussed by Lyons. Penelhum in *Survival and Disembodied Existence* argued that we cannot coherently state what it is for a person to have two distinct experiences without reference to the person's body. Madell plausibly

argues, to the contrary, that what makes several disparate and simultaneous experiences my experiences is just the simple and unanalysable fact that they are mine. However, the fact that “I cannot suppose a group of experiences to be mine when they are not” does not immediately imply that “what their being mine consists in cannot be their simultaneous relationship to my body.” Penelham claimed in *Survival and Disembodied Existence* that the identification of an allegedly resurrected person with her or his original, owing to the time gap between them, could never be more than an option; such an identification could be mandatory only in the case of bodily continuity. MacIntosh argues, with considerable cogency, that personal identity over a time gap is not even an option. Yet surely it is more defensible for the unbeliever to deny that the sorts of events expected by Christians at the end of the world will happen than to insist, as would appear to follow from MacIntosh’s arguments, that even if they did happen they would not amount to resurrection of the dead. Robert Herbert’s reflections on the possibilities of identity over time gaps are a help at this point to people who still wonder whether there is not, after all, some sense in the eschatological expectations of Christians or other religious believers.

The scope and the intrinsic interest of the topics discussed by the contributors should give the reader some idea of the range and depth of Penelham’s thought, and of the extent of his influence.

Faith, Scepticism and Personal Identity

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A Festschrift for Terence Penelhum

edited by

J. J. MacIntosh and H. A. Meynell

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Perceiving God

Kai Nielsen

I

There are many (including myself) who believe that where the god in question is the God of developed Judeo-Christianity and Islam, no experiential cognition of God is a real possibility. Anything that could be perceived would not be the God of those traditions. William Alston carefully argues that this is not so. He seeks “to show that it is possible that in at least some of the cases in which people take themselves to be directly aware of God, they are in fact perceiving God.”¹ He sets out “a minimally controversial view of the basic nature of sense perception” and then tries “to show that it is possible that the experiences in question (or some of them) should exhibit the same generic structure” (50). As careful as Alston’s argumentation is, I do not think he has made his case, or has even come very close to doing so. Indeed, I think he has set himself an impossible task. Yet, to my knowledge at least, his account is the most careful and sophisticated on record. Its failure, if indeed it is a failure, would be of not inconsiderable significance.

I shall follow out Alston’s arguments, critiquing them as I go along. I shall conclude by pulling the strands together and drawing a few lessons. He, as we have noted, wants to show, or at least go some way towards showing, “that a genuine experiential cognition of God is

1. “The Perception of God,” *Philosophical Topics* 16 (1988): 23–52. That, of Alston’s various writings, shall be the central text for my critique. Page references to this article will be given in the text. Other relevant writings of Alston’s include his “Religious Diversity and Perceptual Knowledge of God,” *Faith and Philosophy* 5 (1988): 433–48; “Religious Experience as a Ground of Religious Belief,” in *Religious Experience and Religious Belief*, ed. Joseph Runzo and Craig Ihara (New York: University Press of America, 1986), 31–51; “The Christian Language-Game,” in *The Autonomy of Religious Belief*, ed. Frederick Crossan (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 128–68; and *Divine Nature and Human Language* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), particularly 103–20.

a real possibility . . . if God exists” (25). Against those like myself, he argues that the very idea of such cognition is, while not without its difficulties, still intelligible and, more than that, coherent (25). When he speaks of a God who is supposedly so cognized, he means minimally “a supreme or ultimate personal agent that acts in the light of knowledge, purposes, and intentions” (25). What he wants to establish is that at least in some instances it is not incoherent for a person to believe that God is presenting himself to that person’s experience. These instances will include putative experiences of God’s doing something vis-à-vis human beings, such as speaking or otherwise communicating a message to them. But perhaps even more basically, or paradigmatically, there are the claimed situations in which people just experience God as being present and displaying certain features.

There are many types of alleged experience of God, including the type reported by William James as follows: “God was present though invisible; he fell under no one of my senses. Yet my consciousness perceived him” (23). But Alston wisely concentrates on those experiences in which the awareness of God is mediated by sensory content (26). He is concerned with “those experiences in which it seems that God ‘appears’ or ‘presents himself’ to one as so and so” (26).²

II

I will first describe Alston’s minimally controversial account of the nature of sense perception. “What is distinctive about the perception of something in the physical environment,” Alston remarks, “is that it involves a ‘presentation’ or a ‘givenness’ of the object to experience, to consciousness where the object appears (looks, feels, . . .) as bearing certain phenomenal qualities (configurations of coloured shapes, soundings of varying pitches and intensities, rough or smooth, hot and cold, and so on)” (28). This is what gets added when, for example, one first thinks about a cloud or a face and then opens one’s eyes and looks at the cloud or face. “This is what, most basically, distinguishes perceiving an object from thinking about it, or reasoning about it”

². Classic contemporary critiques of appeals to religious experience have been given by Ronald W. Hepburn, *Christianity and Paradox* (London: Watts, 1958), 24–90 and by C. B. Martin, *Religious Belief* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1959), 64–94. For a response to Hepburn here see John Hick, “A Philosopher Criticizes Theology,” *The London Quarterly* 31 (1962): 103–10. I have defended views similar to Hepburn’s and Martin’s briskly in my *Reason and Practice* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 195–203 and in a somewhat more nuanced and expansive way in my *Scepticism* (London: Macmillan, 1973).

(28). For me to see an apple is for me to have the apple presented to my awareness as bearing certain sensory qualities.

The kind of direct awareness of God that Alston is interested in and that, arguably, is the central paradigm of such awareness, if there is any, is what he calls “mediated immediacy.” In ordinary sense-perception cases, mediated immediacy comes to this: “ordinarily normal vision of objects directly before one’s eyes” (29). To make clear what this comes to by a translation into the concrete, my awareness that I am writing these words with a pencil is mediated by a state of visual consciousness of which I am in turn aware in a different way, but of which I am not, unless “I deliberately attend to it, ordinarily focally aware, and which is distinct from the external physical object that I perceive” (30). In applying this to an awareness of God (if such there be), people having the experience are prepared to say that they are “*directly* aware of the presence and/or activity of God” (30). Here there is the undergoing of a distinctive state of consciousness through which—by virtue of which—we take ourselves to be aware of God. In being directly aware of an apple or of a tree, we are aware of it by means of our senses, of which in turn we may in the perception of the apple or the tree not be directly aware, or attend or advert to at all. Similarly, any direct awareness of God must come to us by means of some state of consciousness that we may in turn not be aware of, or be attending or adverting to at all. We have a certain state of consciousness but in our perception of God, as in our perception of the tree, we typically are not at all aware, or are only peripherally aware, of the state of consciousness that we are in.

On Alston’s conception, “God will have to be directly presented to the subject’s experience as bearing certain phenomenal qualities” (31–32). But to be a direct awareness of God an experience must meet another crucial requirement: in all cases of object perception, the object must make a causal contribution to the occurrence of the experience in question. What we need to ascertain is whether the putative experience of God exhibits “the basic phenomenological structure of sense perception of objects” (35). People who have these religious experiences do typically take themselves “to have been in an experiential cognitive relation to God” that has that structure. God presents himself as goodness and power and as communicating certain messages. Angela of Faligno, for example, “identifies her state as one of directly ‘seeing’ God, rather than as being filled with effects of God’s activity” (37). It is this claim that I think makes no sense and from which Alston tries, knowing how problematic it is, to tease out a

sense. He seeks to make what appears at least to be incoherent, coherent.

III

So much for how people claiming to have religious experience tend to see things. Still, as Alston remarks, an individual's own understanding of his or her experience should not be regarded as infallible. (Here he is, reasonably I believe, far more concessive to modernity in arguing from religious experience than such eminent predecessors as Friedrich Schleiermacher or Rudolph Otto, who claim that religious experience gives us an indubitable grasp of God.) It is, as Alston goes on to remark, "conceivable that one should suppose that a purely affective experience or a strongly held conviction should involve the experiential presentation of God when it doesn't, especially if there is a strong need or longing for such a direct awareness" (37). In other words, powerful affective dispositions can lead one unwittingly to cook the books.

Alston is aware that there is a whole barrage of conceptual problems about whether any such direct cognition of God is even possible or intelligible. The very idea of an "infinite Creator and Lord of the universe being directly perceived" is not a pellucid one. Still, Alston rather lightly puts this issue aside, remarking that it involves considerations concerning the ontology and not the phenomenology of the experience. He claims that what is at issue here is the phenomenological character of the experience and not whether the agent having the experience has got the ontology right, to wit whether he or she actually has an experience of God. Phenomenologically, one can be directly aware of a unicorn or King Arthur even while being mistaken about the existence of unicorns or King Arthur. What one, in such a circumstance, is directly aware of is not what one thinks it is; rather, one is directly aware of something one mistakenly identifies as a unicorn or as King Arthur. But—or so it seems to me—that is not to the point in the case of God, for we could not be phenomenologically or otherwise aware of what it is not even possible to be directly aware of. Such, however, is the challenge being made to claims of religious experience. Thus, to translate into the concrete and to argue first by analogy, if someone says they saw a colourless, shapeless figure we know that they must be somehow mistaken; they could not have seen such a figure any more than someone can draw a round square. This is not a matter of ontology but of what makes sense. What we have in such instances is an incoherent attempt at a phenomenological characterization of an experience. As we shall see (pace Alston)—or

so at least my argument shall go—perceiving God is in the same boat. God is an infinite individual transcendent to the universe, but such a being could not possibly be directly experienced any more than someone could draw a round square or see a shapeless, colourless figure. The case is not, Alston to the contrary notwithstanding, at all like whether someone could see what appears to be a unicorn. The issue in the case of God, as in my two examples, is logical or conceptual and not ontological.

IV

My remarks about what is conceptually possible may seem to some to be a little too quick. (Too quick or not, however, if they are justified they undermine Alston's central claims.) We will return to that issue in section VII, but for the nonce let us put it aside and continue to conduct the argument as Alston does. Let us try to see, the above notwithstanding, if we could be directly aware of God as bearing certain phenomenal qualities. By hypothesis, these qualities are not sensory. But then what could they be? How could they be phenomenal qualities? Have those claiming direct awareness of God given us any intelligible possibilities as to their identity? The trouble here is compounded by the fact that the qualities God is thought to have and of which we are said to be directly aware are not phenomenal qualities. They are things like power, love, goodness, beauty, plenitude. God, that is, is not present in experience in the same way that something is experienced as red, round, acrid, or bitter. But why, Alston asks, must one be directly aware only of qualities of that latter type? Why is it not possible to be *directly aware* of something's being powerful, supremely good, and infinitely strong? The answer often given is that those characteristics cannot be read off the phenomenal surface of experience like something's looking red or feeling soft. Where we are sticking to the phenomenal quality, as when we say something looks red, we are simply recording the qualitative distinctiveness of the way a thing visually appears, and that is all. We are saying nothing, the claim goes, about its causal powers, its entanglements with other things. But in actual life when we say how something looks or otherwise appears, we typically do not restrict ourselves to just recording some phenomenal distinctiveness of the appearance. Sometimes, to take one of several possibilities, we are making comparisons. If I say that the mango looks yellow to me now, that could be to say that the mango looks to me now as a yellow mango would under normal conditions. But that is not to make a phenomenal report, and I am not using "yellow" here as a vehicle for

a phenomenal concept. I am, rather, saying something about how something looks under *normal* conditions. I am making a comparison. There are similar doxastic and epistemic uses of “yellow” that are not purely phenomenal. These are, along with the comparative one, different ways of conceptualizing or identifying appearances.

However, Alston, with his characteristic candour, makes an admission damaging to the analogy with God when he says that, for the various ways of conceptualizing appearances, “a phenomenal concept is, so to say, always in the background even if not explicitly employed” (39). When I say that the mango will look yellow under normal conditions, “I am really presupposing that there is some qualitative distinctiveness to the appearance that could be captured by a phenomenal concept, even though I am using no such concept at the moment” (39). This, Alston stresses, is something important to note (39).

When believers make claims to a direct awareness of God, they typically do not appeal to phenomenal concepts but to such concepts as love, goodness, or power. But we have seen that in many, indeed, in typical non-religious contexts, phenomenal concepts are not appealed to either. So there is, in this respect, nothing anomalous in believers’ direct reports. Believers will say that they are “aware of God as presenting the kind of appearance it would be reasonable to expect a supremely powerful (good, loving, beautiful) being to present. And so from the premise that they are not using phenomenal concepts, it does not follow that they are not reporting how God appears to their experience” (41). Still, in speaking of power (plainly a non-phenomenal concept), we all the same assume—and this is crucial—that the perceiver knows what power or the exercise of power looks like. But where this is questioned, an appeal to some phenomenal concepts emerges, for they are concepts that Alston says must *always* be there in the background for us to be able directly to perceive anything. They are essential for us to find our feet here; that is, for us to achieve an understanding of power or its exercise, there must be phenomenal concepts in the background. What are “the basic phenomenal qualities of the sphere of divine perception, analogous to colour and shape for the visual modality, temperature and texture for the tactile, and so on” (41–42)? Alston admits flatly that he and we, as well, “are quite incapable of enumerating the basic phenomenal qualities of which ‘divine phenomena’ are configurations” (42). To explain *why* this is so (pace Alston) is of no help, given *the fact that it is so*, because in all those situations where we can be tolerably confident that we have a direct awareness of something, there is

there to orient us this background of sensory awareness. If we do not have this in the case of God, or any other case, we are at sea. We have noted already that Alston insists on this sensory background in all other cases. How then can he believe that without it we know where we are at vis-à-vis God? Why should we, when the case of God is so exceptional—so radically different—believe that there can be anything like perceiving God?

There is a further worry. Where we try to supply something like the sensory background for a direct awareness of God, what we get, it seems, are wholly *affective* qualities, namely, “various ways the subject is *feeling* in reaction to what the subject takes to be the presence of God” (42, emphasis added). But feelings are not thought to be the basis of a direct knowledge of or some mode of direct cognition of anything other than feelings or conative dispositions. We do not *directly* cognize non-feeling states via feelings. That I feel sad at the thought of the demise of working-class culture or depressed by male violence to women does not mean that I have by my sadness or depression gained an understanding of these phenomena or some added direct awareness of them, although my affective responses presuppose that I have in some other way some understanding of the phenomena. But the affective response itself is not a further element in that understanding by a kind of knowledge by acquaintance. Feeling sad gives me an understanding of sadness; feeling dependent may give me an understanding of what it is to be dependent but not of an utterly other, totally non-dependent being transcendent to the world.

Alston resists the idea that restriction of phenomenal content to affect rules “out the possibility of an objective reality’s appearing to the subject therein” (43). He rightly notes that affective qualities are subjective in a way similar to sensory qualities or (if you will) to non-affective sensory qualities. But that subjectivity is not what is at issue here. What is at issue, and what is to the point, comes out in the following contrasts. That I see the blood on the floor is one thing, that I am shocked by it is another; that I feel the green mould under the carpet is one thing, that I feel disgusted by it is another; that I smell the rotting whale on the beach is one thing, that I am nauseated by it is another. One—the seeing, feeling (tactile), smelling—is a form of knowledge by direct awareness. The other is an affective response to that knowledge; but it is not itself a new form of direct knowledge of anything other than feelings or conative dispositions. If “the whole phenomenal content of the experience of God” is affective, we have very good reason indeed (pace Alston) for doubting that we

could possibly have a “veridical perception of God” (43). But it seems at least to be just that.

V

Alston, mistakenly thinking he has gone around the above problems, then says something that seems to square badly with remarks made earlier in “The Perception of God,” namely, remarks about (1) phenomenal concepts always being at least in the background and (2) there being no possibility of direct awareness of God without them (39). He says in a later passage that “one does not have to be able to isolate and identify basic phenomenal qualities in order to have experience and use it as a vehicle of perception” (44). I think—and if this is so it defuses the conflict—that in speaking *here* of phenomenal concepts not always being in the background, he is thinking of the old reductionist program of analysing more complex structures into their constituent elements of phenomenal qualities; that is, he is thinking of the old phenomenalist program. That, as the history of the critique of reductionism has made clear, is surely a justified critique.³ No such reduction can be carried out. But from that it does not follow that we would understand what the direct awareness of anything could come to without understanding something of the sensory awareness that we would have to have to be so aware; or at the very least, the perceiver would have to have that understanding. “Children,” no doubt, “learn to recognize people, buildings and toys without having any conception of the way in which sensory appearances of things are built up from elementary phenomenal qualities” (39). But Janet could hardly learn to recognize Uncle Ben without coming to recognize that man with the large red nose, the hoarse voice, the dark horn-rimmed glasses, the whisky breath, and the like: that is, without having certain sensory experiences. Some such sensory acquaintance is going to be necessary for her to be able to recognize Uncle Ben at all. (If this be empiricism, make the most of it. Sometimes empiricism, properly constrained, is neither a metaphysical view nor an ideology but just solid common sense.) She, of course, does not have to have a theory or even a conception of these sensory experiences, but she

³. J. L. Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962); Paul Marhenke, “Phenomenalism,” in *Philosophical Analyses*, ed. Max Black (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1950), 299–322; and J. L. Mackie, “What’s Really Wrong with Phenomenalism,” *British Academy Proceedings* 55 (1969), 113–27. For powerful, more generalized critiques of reductionism, see Hilary Putnam, *Realism and Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) and Richard Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

needs to have them to be aware directly of anything at all, whether it is yellow mangos, Socratic philosophers, or God. Yet in the alleged God-awareness case all we have by way of phenomenal qualities is the *affective reactions* of the putative direct knower. They give us some direct knowledge of the emotional life of the alleged knower but nothing at all in the way of knowledge of God; they do not show that we are or could be directly aware of God. We need not say that “human sense perception constitutes a priori limits on what is possible by way of direct experiences of objective beings by cognitive subjects” (44). There is no need to employ any conception of the a priori at all, much less the setting of a priori limits. (It is not clear in any event what that would come to.) But when we reflect on what perception comes to—where, that is, we know our way around with such things, including talk of them – we realize that, aside (perhaps) from our awareness of ourselves, being directly aware of things involves having certain sensory qualities: being aware peripherally or focally of some sensory characteristics. If there is to be any literal encountering (direct awareness) of God, this must be in a visible, auditory, or other sensible form.⁴ But this cannot be, given what God is, and thus we have no understanding of what it would be to encounter God. Some people talk of a non-sensory direct experience of God, but no more sense has been given to that than has been given to a claim that I sleep faster than Norman Malcolm. (There are indeed mystical experiences, but whether they are cognitive is another thing again.)⁵

⁴. Unless we are going to say, wildly implausibly, that being directly aware of God, the utterly other, is like being directly aware of ourselves. Moreover, such a direct knowledge, even if coherent, is utterly unlike perceptual knowledge. It is not what we would think perceptual knowledge of God would come to. But Alston is talking of perceptual knowledge of God, and it is here where he most essentially rests his case. Hepburn’s criticism of Martin Buber (*Christianity and Paradox*, 28, 48–59) could usefully be noted here. It should also be said that if the perceptual knowledge is *direct awareness* of God, it cannot be an *inferring* of God from our experience of sensible things. That would not be direct awareness, and if we did appeal to it we would in effect be attempting some crude version of one of the traditional proofs. But as Schleiermacher and Otto were well aware, as well as more recent defenders of the claim that religious experience can give us knowledge of God (such as Emil Brunner, H.H. Farmer, John Baillie, H. D. Lewis, and W. D. Glasgow), our philosophical and theological concern with such alleged direct awareness emerges as an alternative to the traditional proofs, or indeed to proofs *sans phrase*. If we abandon direct awareness, we are back in the old trap of natural theology. The appeal to religious experience was made by philosopher-theologians who were convinced that the proofs would not work and who were trying to provide the believer with other assurances. Hepburn and Martin are perfectly aware that that is the name of the game here.

⁵. See here Williams James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Modern Library, 1929); W. T. Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1960);

VI

Near the end of his “The Perception of God,” Alston asks a question on which I have in various writings centred considerable attention:⁶ “How does a person identify what is appearing to her at a given moment as God, the source of all being other than Himself, judge and redeemer of mankind?” (47). Alston tries to deflect that question by trotting out a general epistemological/conceptual consideration. It is not necessary for an experience’s being a case of perceiving God that the subject know, or even be able to tell, that it is God she is perceiving. This point holds quite generally for perception: “I can be seeing the Louvre while supposing that it is the Palais Royale” (47). But if in directly perceiving God the perceiver is not cognizant that it is God she is perceiving, the fact (if it is a fact) that she is perceiving God is cold comfort to her and to us. We would like to know whether we can sometimes ascertain that it is God we are perceiving. We would also like to know whether our perceiving God can provide us with a justified belief that God exists. So we should not avoid the question of “whether, and how, one can identify what is appearing as God”⁷ (46). But what Alston utterly fails to do, as far as I can ascertain, is to give us good reasons for believing that anything that could appear to us could be the God of the Judeo-Christian-Islamic traditions.⁸ I shall in the next sections give some reasons for believing that no such perception, no such direct awareness, is possible.

VII

Alston makes it clear in *Divine Nature and Human Language* that the conception of God he wishes to elucidate and defend is the God of traditional Judeo-Christianity. He uses techniques of analytical philosophy in carrying out that elucidation and defence. That is, he uses contemporary analytic techniques to defend traditional Judeo-Chris-

and Ninian Smart, *Reasons and Faiths* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958). Terence Penelhum gives a balanced and fair-minded account of the claims of religious experience in his *Religion and Rationality* (New York: Random House, 1971), 163–84.

⁶. Kai Nielsen: “On Speaking of God,” *Theoria* 28 (1962): 110–37; *Contemporary Critiques of Religion* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971); *Scepticism* (London: Macmillan, 1973); *An Introduction to Philosophy of Religion* (London: Macmillan, 1982); *Philosophy and Atheism* (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1985); and *God, Scepticism and Modernity* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1989).

⁷. It should be noted that this commits me to neither semantic nor epistemic verificationism, though to say this is not even to give to understand, let alone to assert, that verificationism in either or both of these senses may not in some fairly attenuated sense be a good thing. The rather wholesale rejection of verificationism needs looking at with a sceptical eye.

⁸. It could, of course, be an anthropomorphic embodied God.

tian religious and theological propositions or stances. It is, it should be reiterated, the philosophically (conceptually or cosmologically) at-risk parts of that tradition that he wishes to defend, and not some pared-down, revisionist rewriting of the tradition and its canonical concepts as, say, in the writings of R. B. Braithwaite, R. M. Hare, and D. Z. Phillips, where a shift occurs in the very use of “God,” a shift designed to square more readily with modern sensibilities.⁹ Alston, by contrast, seeks to deploy the best techniques of analytic philosophy in defence of *traditional* Christianity, not some revisionist rational reconstruction.¹⁰

I have maintained against Alston that, given the concept of God embedded in traditional Judeo-Christianity, there is no coherent possibility that the God of that tradition, if he indeed exists or could exist, could be perceived or be encountered or be the object of any kind of direct awareness. I shall now make good my promise to argue that central consideration more extensively.

Alston gives no full characterization of the God he claims that some believers at least could possibly perceive, but the God he must be talking about—the God of the developed forms of Judeo-Christianity—is to be characterized thus: A person without a body (that is, a spirit), present everywhere, the creator and sustainer of the universe, able to do anything (that is, omnipotent), knowing all things, perfectly good, a source of moral obligation, immutable, eternal, a necessary being, holy and supremely worthy of worship).¹¹ This is the

⁹. Where we get the dividing line between revisionism and traditional Christianity is not easy to decide. Alston sees himself as a fairly conservative Christian explicating and defending traditional doctrines, but from a Christian fundamentalist position, he is a revisionist. What a philosopher can do is look at various conceptions of God and see what can be said for them. Still, a conception at great distance from something recognizable as the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition would be of little interest.

¹⁰. Shabbir Akhtar, *The Light in the Enlightenment* (London: Grey Seal Books, 1990), 8 and chaps. 5 and 6, reasoning from a rather orthodox Islamic perspective, but one that has much in common with Orthodox Christianity, develops with care a conception of revisionism, applying it to Terence Penelhum, Richard Swinburne, and John Hick (among others). It is a moot point whether it would apply to Alston as well. But we must be careful here that we do not so circumscribe “believer” that we end up identifying Christian, Jewish, and Islamic believers with what R. M. Hare called “simple believers,” making all the rest, and not just reductionists such as D. Z. Phillips or R. Braithwaite, disguised secularists or secularists in spite of themselves. For further remarks on revisionism see Shabbir Akhtar, *Reason and the Radical Crisis of Faith* (New York: Peter Lang, 1987), 134–206. Akhtar is perfectly prepared to confront and affront modern sensibilities.

¹¹. Richard Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), gives a characterization something like this. Significantly, though ambiguously, he speaks of a theist as someone who conceives of God as “something like a ‘person’ without a body (i.e. a spirit).”

God of traditional Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Such a God is a person, though an extraordinary person, for he is also the creator and sustainer of the universe, bodiless (non-material and non-physical) yet everywhere while still being a non-physical person who acts in the world; indeed, he is the person who brought the very universe into existence from nothing, yet being the person that he is, he, while remaining a person (an individual acting in the world), is an infinite, wholly other individual transcendent to the very universe itself. This, if such a being could exist, or be a being, is a very extraordinary being indeed. It is a conception, to understate it, that, if we attempt to think about it in a literal way, is utterly baffling. It is difficult to see how it could add up to a coherent conception; it is not clear that we can string those words together in such a way as to make sense.¹²

It is drastically unclear what an infinite bodiless individual could be, to say nothing of an infinite individual who is transcendent to the universe. The first is conceptually opaque, the second adds insult to injury concerning such an opaqueness. But that, all the same, is the God of the tradition. There could be no literal seeing, perceiving, or encountering of such a being. He is transcendent to the universe and is thus in some sense beyond or outside of the universe itself, but we human beings are in the universe with no conception even of what it would be like to be outside of the universe, or to perceive beyond the universe, or to perceive something outside of the universe (assuming we can give any sense at all to that). Something that is transcendent to the universe could not be seen or be otherwise observed by us (or by anything else in the universe). If a being was seen or otherwise observed, that being would be in the universe, but any being who was in the universe and not transcendent to the universe would thereby not be the God of the tradition.

Even if we somehow—to me inconceivably—set that aside, we, God being transcendent to the universe or not, have no coherent

¹². Many of the central considerations come out in a neglected but crucial exchange between John Skorupski and Robin Horton. See Horton, "A Definition of Religion and its Uses," *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 90 (1962) 201–26; Horton, "African Traditional Thought and Western Science," *Africa* 37 (1967), 131–71; Skorupski, "Science and Traditional Religious Thought I and II," *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 3 (1973), 209–30; Horton, "Paradox and Explanation: A Reply to Mr. Skorupski," *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 3 (1973), 289–312; Horton, "Levy-Bruhl, Durkheim and the Scientific Revolution," in *Modes of Thought*, eds. Robin Horton and Peter Finnegan (London: Faber and Faber, 1973), 249–305; Skorupski, "Comment on Professor Horton's 'Paradox and Explanation,'" *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 5 (1975) 63–70; and Skorupski, *Symbol and Theory* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

conception of what it would be like to see or perceive in or out of the universe a bodiless and shapeless (odourless, tasteless) person (even assuming such a conception makes sense). How could we pick out—identify—such a person through observation, thus distinguishing him from other persons and thereby locating him? We could, of course, be directly aware of a discrete embodied individual, even of a rather large individual, only a part of which we could in fact observe at any one time from our position in space-time. (Nobody has, or can have, a view from nowhere.) We could make definite observations of certain parts of him at one time and then at a later time, from different positions, make further observations of other parts of him. But for such perceivings to be possible, he must have a body. This, to say something very obvious, is so even if the being is rather large. For observation to be possible he must somehow be bounded—even though very large—so that we could have some conception of what it was not, as well as what it was, to be perceiving him. But God—this infinite individual—is said to be not only an individual, but everywhere (utterly unbounded); but then there is no possibility of perceiving him, for we are without a conception of misperceiving him or seeing something else that is to be contrasted with him, as when one meets Thatcher while searching for Bush. A bodiless, shapeless, odourless, tasteless (in the appropriate sense) person is not a person we could possibly directly perceive or be directly aware of.

When we add omnipresence (being everywhere) and infinitude we have a conceptual clash with the very notion of a person (an individual). An unbounded, infinite individual is a very curious kind of individual indeed. “Discrete person” seems, at the very least, to be pleonastic.¹³ Moreover, in an “infinite, omnipresent person,” even if we allow such a jumble of words, we have something that we have no conception of what it would be like to observe, see, perceive, or be directly aware of. We do not understand what it would be like for there to be such a reality. Anything we could see and identify would have to be finite and discrete, though, again, it could be very big.

It might be said in response that within the Christian tradition God is said to be *immanent* as well as *transcendent*. Suppose it is said, in the face of my above arguments, that it is only God in his immanency that is encountered. There is still, of course, the difficulty about the bodiless part, but *perhaps* there is some way around the

¹³. For an argument that it is pleonastic, see Axel Hägerström, *Philosophy and Religion*, trans. Robert T. Sandin (London: Allen and Unwin, 1964), 175–305.

bog that I do not see. Be that as it may, if we encounter (see, perceive) God only in his immanency, we could hardly have anything like even an approximately adequate knowledge (understanding) of God.¹⁴ For God's transcendency is central to our conception of him. But there is no experiential awareness of that, for there is no perceiving (at least from a non-transcendental perspective) a transcendent being, and thus there is no perceiving God as the tradition portrays him.

VIII

Alston, however, does not always portray God in such abstract and metaphysical terms: as such a vigorously transcendent being. In fact, in "The Perception of God" he travels metaphysically lighter. There he characterizes God, in one instance, as "the source of all being other than Himself, judge and redeemer of mankind" (47) and, in another instance, as "a supreme or ultimate personal agent that acts in the light of knowledge, purposes, and institutions" (25). Take the latter description, leaving aside initially "ultimate" in the characterization of God as a personal agent. It is not at all clear that it could not be possible—and Alston claims no more—to perceive a being so characterized. It is not, of course, so evident how we could know we are perceiving a supreme personal agent, but by comparison with "infinite individual transcendent to the world" the idea of such a perception, though unclear, does not seem incoherent. Even "ultimate" is not an utter stumbling block, though what an ultimate personal agent might be is, to put it mildly, not obvious. Perhaps Alston means nothing more than an uncreated personal agent who created everything else other than himself. It is not clear how we could identify such an agent by observation, but it is also not clear that no such observations could be made. Where the burden of proof lies here is not evident, but Alston might say that at least the issue is left open: we do not know that there could be no experiential direct awareness of God *so characterized*.

Similar things could be said about the first of his characterizations quoted above. Of course, "the source of all being other than Himself" is vexingly problematic, but perhaps that problematicity is containable. It can perhaps be kept from collapsing into outright

¹⁴ Christians and Jews will, of course, say that we can have no adequate conception of God, at least "in this life." But such a radically inadequate conception, where we can have no understanding *at all* of "transcendent individuals," moves too much in the direction of incoherence to be reflectively acceptable.

incoherence. In any event, it is not crystal clear that such a being is imperceptible.

Such an Alstonian response, as far as it goes, seems to me fair enough. But it does not go nearly far enough. His definitions or characterizations of God are meant to be informal and are not designed to capture in as full a way as possible what traditional Christianity takes God to be. As such, they are what Paul Edwards has aptly characterized as low redefinitions.¹⁵ They utterly fail to catch the sense of the transcendency of God, the utter otherness of God, something that is essential to that tradition, a tradition that Alston wishes to defend. Of course, if we make our God anthropomorphic enough, Zeus-like enough, there will be no *conceptual* problem about perceiving or observing such a cosmic superman. Whether such a being has in fact ever been detected is another matter altogether. But such a God would hardly be an adequate object of religious worship; and it is clear in *Divine Nature and Human Language* that that is not the kind of God in whose service Alston places his philosophical theology. And if it were, it would then be clear that Alston was no longer defending the tradition in which God is conceived to be a wholly other, ultimate spiritual reality, ultimate and still a person, wholly distinct from the world and (if this doesn't come to the same thing) transcendent to it.

This, as I and others have argued, is a very opaque reality indeed: perhaps so opaque as to be an incoherent conception.¹⁶ Jews, Christians, and Moslems can fairly enough respond that the God of their traditions could not fail to be mysterious. A reality that was not an ultimate mystery would not be their God. That should be granted; and that granted, the crucial point at issue is whether this conception of God we have is so opaque as to be not only mysterious but also, as I believe it to be, incoherent. More accurately, what is at issue is whether what appears to be, or at least what religious believers claim to be, an ultimate mystery will be seen on careful inspection instead to be an incoherency.

One way to show that the God of the tradition is mysterious but not incoherent is to show that some people, perhaps only some people of deep faith, have a direct awareness of God, though they see now

¹⁵ Paul Edwards characterizes low redefinitions well in his *The Logic of Moral Discourse* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1955).

¹⁶ Paul Edwards: "Difficulties in the Idea of God," in *The Idea of God*, ed. Edward H. Madden et al. (Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, 1968), 43–77; "Notes on Anthropomorphic Theology," in *Religious Experience and Truth*, ed. Sidney Hook (New York: New York University Press, 1961), 241–50.

through a glass darkly. Against people like myself who argue that such awareness is not possible, even through a glass darkly, Alston argues not for its reality (which he neither affirms nor denies) but for its *possibility*. This is, of course, a necessary prolegomena in establishing that there is indeed such direct knowledge. Where the God in question is the transcendent God of the tradition, I have argued that Alston fails to show that that is a genuine possibility. If I am right here and if Alston's case for the experiential path is about as good a case for such a claim as could be made (something I believe it to be), then one crucial avenue to making sense of belief in God has been blocked. At the very least, as careful an argument for it as we are likely to get has been undermined, and we are left with very general sceptical arguments for believing that no such direct awareness is possible standing unrefuted.¹⁷

¹⁷. We are back to the standard arguments made by Hepburn, Martin, and myself. See references in note 2, and see as well J. L. Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982). For an argument that Mackie, the excellence of his book notwithstanding, passes over too easily questions about the coherence of his religious beliefs, siding here too uncritically with Richard Swinburne, see Antony Flew, "The Burden of Proof," in *Knowing Religiously*, ed. Leroy S. Rouner (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), 103–15.

On Religious Experience

John Hick

Terence Penelhum has made major contributions to the philosophy of religion, perhaps above all in the area of religious epistemology. I hope, therefore, that a discussion of religious experience will be appropriate in this volume dedicated to him.

If we start from ordinary usage, we can say that interpretation is concerned with meaning, and presupposes that there is something (using that term in its most comprehensive sense to include entities, statements, actions, complex situations, or indeed the universe as a whole) whose meaning is not indisputably self-evident to us. There is accordingly ambiguity, making room for alternative construals, some of which will normally be misconstruals.

Ordinary usage thus suggests a dichotomy between objective facts.*i.e.* facts, objective and subjective interpretations of; (statements, actions, entities, situations, the universe as a whole) and subjective interpretations of them. However, at this point we need to distinguish between the two main families of meanings of “meaning”: on the one hand, the various kinds of semantic meaning.*i.e.* meaning, semantic and dispositional; (*i.e.*, the meaning of linguistic utterances), and on the other hand, the kinds of what I shall call dispositional meaning (*i.e.*, the practical meaning, for the interpreter, of objects, events, and situations). In the case of semantic meaning there is indeed a dichotomy between a linguistic entity—a sentence, an exclamation, a command—and an interpretation of it. But dispositional meaning is importantly different. The world is indeed there, and is as it is; but we do not have access to it as it is in itself, unperceived by us. We are aware of it only as it impinges upon us and is perceived and inhabited by us in terms of many kinds and levels of dispositional meaning. The dispositional meaning of an object, event, or situation consists in the practical difference that it makes, currently and/or potentially, to the meaning-perceiver. For example, I perceive what is before me as an orange. In so doing I am recognizing

or identifying something by means of the concept “orange.” And my recognizing it as an orange consists in part in my being in a dispositional state in relation to it that is appropriate (as I take it) to its being an orange rather than something else. Such a dispositional state usually cannot be fully spelled out, but it includes, in this case, being liable in certain circumstances to eat the orange, and it excludes, for example, expecting it to talk or grow wings or prove to be as heavy as lead. Thus, when I see or, using all the relevant senses together, when I experience this as an orange, my total dispositional state includes a sub-range of dispositions that is appropriate to this thing’s being an orange. And the same holds for everything else that I recognize, that is, am aware of as being some particular kind of thing or, in other words, as instantiating some concept.

The dispositional meaning of events is more complex than that of individual objects, being usually an aspect of the yet more complex and comprehensive significance of a situation. A situation is composed of objects but has its own dispositional meaning over and above the separate meanings of its constituent objects. Consider, for example, the situation that we describe as a session of an academic conference. The participants, having been prepared by invitations, programs, and other documents, are automatically experiencing what is going on around them as a session within, let us say, an American Philosophical Association meeting. They are in a dispositional state to behave appropriately—by listening to the paper, being ready to raise questions and to discuss after the paper has been read, and so on. And this rather complex readiness to behave in certain kinds of ways and not in others presupposes an extensive network of concepts that are part of our modern western academic culture. But a Stone Age person suddenly brought into an academic conference would not perceive what is going on as having the same character or meaning. The Stone Age person would not have the concepts of “conference session,” “academic discussion,” “scholarly paper,” “philosophy,” or most of the wider conceptual field to which these belong, and would accordingly experience the same physical configuration as having some quite different meaning to which a quite different dispositional state would be appropriate.

Human life is normally lived at this situational level of complexity. And whereas the dispositional meaning for us of natural objects, such as oranges, consists in our practical adaptation to the physical world, situational meaning is largely a cultural construct. For our inhabited world of meaning—corresponding to the *Lebenswelt* of the

phenomenologists—depends upon our corporate systems of concepts.i.concept systems;, which have formed over the decades, centuries, or even millennia, and are embodied in our developing languages. Our experienced and inhabited world accordingly varies considerably through time and across cultures.

Returning now to our imagined conference, its participants, although intent upon the business before them, are at the same time potentially within a range of other situations. On one level (in a sense of “level” to be indicated in a moment) they are not only at the gathering in, let us say, San Francisco, but also in the larger situation of the life of that city and the still wider situation of the earthquake region of California. And if an earthquake suddenly occurred, their situational awareness would at once shift to this new context of meaning, evoking a different dispositional state, expressing itself in appropriately different patterns of behaviour.

In such a case the new focus of attention would supersede the previous one. And it is a feature of situations of this kind, on what I am calling the same level, that they are more or less mutually exclusive, so that we can usually only live effectively in one at a time. But we can, and often do, live simultaneously in relation to *different* levels of meaning—levels in the sense that a higher includes but transcends a lower level. The three such levels that have long been recognized in western thought are the physical, the ethical, and the religious. Notice that in each case meaning has an essential behavioural aspect: the meaning of an object, event, or situation is defined in terms of the practical dispositional state in which one is in virtue of recognizing that object, event, or situation as having that particular character. (“Recognize” here, of course, includes “misrecognize,” for when we make mistakes in identifying what is before us or around us we still respond by varying our dispositional

state in relation to it, though this is then an inappropriate instead of an appropriate variation.)

On the physical level of meaning are all the ways in which we experience material objects, events, and situations as being such that it is appropriate for us to behave in relation to them, or within them, in one range of ways rather than another. To experience this as a pen, that as a table, and that over there as a mountain, and to experience a conference, a family meal, walking on a sidewalk, driving a car, and so on, as we do, are examples of our continuous awareness of meaning at this basic level. It is because we perceive our environment as having meaning in this dispositional sense that we are able to live from moment to moment and year to year within it.

Such a dispositional analysis of recognition in terms of concepts presupposes, of course, some basic aim or desire on our part, such that this rather than some other set of readinesses for action becomes appropriate. Roughly, in relation to our physical environment, the basic aim that renders a particular dispositional response appropriate is the aim of surviving and, beyond this, of flourishing in terms of such basic natural values as health and contentment.

Our ordinary everyday consciousness of our physical environment is thus normally a continuous consciousness of it as having various kinds of meaning in virtue of which we have some notion of how to behave within it in order to fulfil our basic aim as animal organisms. This everyday consciousness normally occurs at the situational, rather than the object, order of complexity. All this applies to the lower as well as to the human form of animal life, though with two differences: the situations of which we humans are conscious can have a much greater temporal extension, and what are in the lower animals simply

recognitional capacities have been abstracted by the human mind as concepts fixed by language.

It is within our human situational awareness that the next level of meaning, the ethical, arises. I shall say very little about this here, since it is not the primary concern of this paper. But situations of which other persons are constituents always have actual or potential ethical meaning for us. That is to say, they may render appropriate some action or range of actions determined not by the aim of surviving, but by a moral principle. In my view, Kant successfully identified the basic nature of the distinctively moral aim as that of treating oneself and others equally as ends in ourselves. In terms of this basic aim, interpersonal situations can take on a further meaning, whose appropriate dispositional response may be at variance with, and claim to override, that rendered appropriate by their purely physical meaning. Thus, anyone who incurs death or pain or even discomfort or inconvenience in order to treat others as ends rather than as means is responding to the distinctively ethical character of some situation. The physical situation remains unchanged, but the way in which it is experienced has changed, in that it is now perceived as also having moral significance.

Now let us turn to the religious level or order of meaning. Here we apply religious concepts both to external objects, events, and situations and to the events and states of our inner life. On the face of it, some forms of religion are more concerned with the inner and others with the outer realm. However, we must not make the mistake of characterizing whole traditions in these terms—for example, as exclusively “prophetic” or exclusively “mystical.” For the various kinds of religious experience constitute, I shall argue, a continuum ranging

from the purely “external” to the purely “internal,” the entire spectrum being present in varying proportions within each large and long-lived tradition. Further, I shall argue that religious experience throughout this continuum consists—if understood religiously—in the presence of a transcendent divine Reality coming to consciousness in terms of our human concepts. Because the different ways of being human have produced a variety of such conceptual systems, with their associated spiritual practices, the transcendent Reality (which I shall refer to simply as the Real) postulated by a religious understanding of religion is experienced in a variety of ways that have become enshrined in the different religious traditions.

I have spoken of the presence of the Real coming to consciousness in us as our awareness of the Real. In the case of physical realities, their presence to us comes to consciousness by means of their impact upon our sense organs, which is somehow translated into modifications of consciousness that are endowed with dispositional meaning by the system of physical-object and physical-situation concepts in terms of which we live. In contrast to this, the presence of the Real affects us by a non-physical impact, which comes to consciousness in forms that are endowed with dispositional meanings supplied by our system of religious concepts.

This occurs in a range of ways. At one end of the spectrum—where most moments of religious awareness are concentrated—our attention is directed upon the material environment, but we experience this not only in terms of physical concepts but at the same time on another level, in terms of religious concepts, so that some object or event or situation is experienced as mediating the divine presence to us. At the other end of the

spectrum, the divine presence is experienced independently of the physical environment, in forms supplied by the mystic's religious concepts. Between these extremes are various mixed modes, as I shall indicate in a moment.

Let us note some examples along this spectrum. The kinds of objects that are experienced as having religious significance include icons, images, and idols (such as are found in Orthodox and Catholic churches and Hindu temples), symbolic objects (such as a cross or the star of David or the bread and wine in the eucharist), and also holy places (such as Mecca, Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Vrindaban, Benares, Bodh Gaya). To experience these as having religious significance is to be in a dispositional state in relation to them that can be broadly characterized as reverence, a receptivity through which (on a religious interpretation of religion) the Transcendent is mediated to us.

However, religious experiencing-as more commonly occurs in the awareness of situational than of object meaning. Thus, at the situational level the religious consciousness may find a further order of meaning in the moral life, interpreting the ethical requirements of the interpersonal world as mediating either the external claim of God or the internal requirement of Dharma, leading one to act or refrain from acting in this or that way. But it may also find a religious meaning in any or all of the events of individual life and corporate history. Thus, in Hebrew religious consciousness it has embraced the entire national story, seen as a living out of the covenant with Yahweh. For the understanding of history expressed in the Hebrew Scriptures is one in which crucial events have a religious significance. The exodus from Egypt, the wandering in the desert, the settlement

in Canaan, the exile in Babylon, the return, are all presented as happenings in and through which God was guiding, disciplining, or caring for the chosen people. Much of the story, as it is told in the Hebrew Bible, has reached mythic proportions, and we do not know precisely to what extent it is rooted in history. But in some of the prophetic writings we come closer to history as it was taking place and was experienced at the time as having religious significance. For example, it seems that Jeremiah in the sixth century B.C.E. experienced the Babylonian army marching on Jerusalem as being wielded by Jahweh to punish faithless Judah.

It is in such historical events that we find the foundational religious experiences that have given rise to the three Abrahamic religions of the Book. Each is based upon special revelatory moments in which historical events were experienced as divine epiphanies. Thus Moses' experience at the "burning bush," and in receiving the Law on Mount Sinai, and again the communal experience of the exodus from Egypt, were foundationally revelatory events for Judaism. Jesus' intense experience of God as *abba*, Father, expressed in his life, teaching, and death, including the unknown event that has come to be called his Resurrection, is the foundationally revelatory event for Christianity. And the prophet Muhammad's experience, over a period of some twenty years, of hearing a heavenly voice reciting the words that became the Qur'an is the foundationally revelatory event for Islam.

Each of these required an appropriate interpretation, or mode of experiencing-as, in order to have the character of revelation. Considered simply as historical events, each is capable of being construed both religiously and naturalistically. When someone—Moses, Jesus,

Muhammad—reports that they were conscious of a divine presence or heard a divine voice, it is always open to the sceptic to grant that they had the experiences they report but to hold nevertheless that these were hallucinatory in character, being projections of their own unconscious minds. Thus, sceptics have held that Moses was deluded; that Jesus' intense communion with God was a religious hallucination; and that the suras of the Qur'an are purely the product of Muhammad's own mind, without any transcendent input.

We are noticing here an aspect of what we can call the religious ambiguity of the universe—the fact that from our present standpoint within it, the universe is capable of being intellectually understood and concretely experienced in both religious and naturalistic ways. I shall come later to the question whether, and if so how, this ambiguity may be resolved. But first let us look more widely at the religious way of experiencing what is happening around us and within us.

Within the theistic traditions the broadest term for the dispositional aspect of this mode of experiencing-as is worship. But this includes much more than specific acts of prayer and liturgical behaviour. It includes a centring of one's existence in God, expressed in obedience and trust and in a consequent release from self-centredness and a freedom to love others; and also in an ultimate confidence that (in Lady Julian's words) "all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well."¹

To depict in this way a life lived in the conscious relationship to God that we call worship is, of course, to picture an ideal. Most of us live most of the time in forgetfulness of God and with our existence centred in ourselves. Nevertheless, this God-centred form of life re-

1. Julian of Norwich, *Showings*, long text, trans. Edmund Colledge and James Walsh (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), chap. 27.

mains the ideal that we see embodied in considerable degree in some of the great saints of our different traditions, and in many much lesser degrees in many ordinary believers. When such a believer reports the “sense of the presence of God,” or perhaps better, the sense of being in God’s presence, she is experiencing her total situation as mediating the divine reality. This mode of experiencing-as may be triggered in many ways—by a feeling of finitude, contingency, and absolute dependence; by a moment of deep appreciation of the grandeur and beauty of the natural world; by gratitude for life’s goodness, or by the fellowship of suffering in time of disaster or tragedy; by reflection on “the starry heavens above and the moral law within”; or indeed by all manner of individual promptings. When such a “trigger” operates, there is an apperceptive switch analogous to that which occurs when, looking at a puzzle picture, we suddenly see a face where before we saw only a confusion of lines. The religious person is now experiencing-as in a new and importantly different way.

Such an apperceptive switch can produce a fairly focused sense, momentary or prolonged, of being in the divine presence. But it can also produce a more general or diffused awareness of the world as manifesting the divine and thus as having a new meaning and value. Speaking metaphorically, the light of God’s presence now shines through it. Two well-known examples will suffice to illustrate this mode of experience. George Fox, the founder of Quakerism, recorded in his journal that “all things were new; and all the creation gave another smell unto me than before, beyond what words can utter”;² and Jonathan Edwards, the New England theologian, tells how “the appearance of everything was altered; there seemed to be, as it were, a calm, sweet cast, or appearance of divine glory, in almost everything. God’s excellency, his wisdom, his purity and love, seemed to appear in everything; in the sun, moon and stars; in the clouds and blue sky; in the grass, flowers and trees; in the water and all nature.”³

But religious experiencing-as is not, of course, always theistic. Within the Mahayana tradition of Buddhism there is the startling claim that *samsara*, the ordinary process of human life, pervaded as it is by *dukkha* (“suffering,” “unsatisfactoriness”), is identical with

². *The Journal of George Fox* (1924; reprint, London: J. M. Dent, 1994), 17.

³. Quoted by William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902; reprint, New York: Mentor Books, 1960), 248.

nirvana. That is to say, experienced from the point of view of the self-concerned, grasping ego, life involves the ineradicable anxieties and fears engendered by our vulnerability to unpredictable chances and to the inevitability of decay and death. But experienced from the standpoint of the “true” or “original” self, found by transcending ego-centredness and realizing one’s own universal Buddha nature, life is free from these deep human anxieties. Although still finite, vulnerable, and mortal, the “awakened one” rejoices to be part of the ever-changing flow of *pratitya-samutpada*, the unitary interdependent life of the universe. Father Heinrich Dumoulin quotes this description of the *satori* experience by a contemporary Zen priest:

Enlightenment is an overwhelming realization which comes suddenly. Man feels himself at once free and strong, exalted and great, in the universe. The breath of the universe vibrates through him. No longer is he merely a small, selfish ego, but rather he is open and transparent, united to all in unity. Enlightenment is achieved in *zazen* [meditation], but it remains effective in all situations of life. Thus everything in life is meaningful, worthy of thanks, and good—even suffering, sickness and death.⁴

So far, then, we have been noting that there are religious ways, theistic and nontheistic, of experiencing both particular objects, events, and situations, and our total existence in the world—all these being, on a religious understanding of them, modes of response to the universal presence of the Real.

As we move along the spectrum from the external to the internal, we come next to types of religious experience in which the mystic—for at this point that term begins to be commonly used—whilst being outwardly aware of the world, is also inwardly aware of the Transcendent, and projects the latter awareness as a vision or audition or photism. There are numerous examples of this in the Scriptures and in the post-Scriptural histories of the various traditions. One example that well illustrates this mixture of the inner and the outer is the experience of the mystic Julian of Norwich, whom I quoted earlier, as she lay apparently dying and looking at a crucifix that a priest was holding before her. Her awareness of the Real came to her in distinctively Christian terms as a sense of the divine love manifested in Jesus’ death on the cross, and so fused with her perception of the

⁴ *A History of Zen Buddhism*, trans. Paul Peachey (1959; reprint, New York: Random House, 1963), 275.

wooden figure that “suddenly I saw the red blood trickling down from under the crown, all hot, flowing freely and copiously, a living stream, just as it seemed to me that it was when the crown of thorns was thrust down upon his blessed head.”⁵ Her receptiveness at this moment to the presence of the Divine, the Real, was given form (I am suggesting) by the religious ideas instilled in her by her tradition, and so created this vivid experience. Moving yet further along the spectrum, there are forms of religious experience in which the outer world plays no part. The mystic is in a state of deep meditation or trance, unconscious of the external environment. “To one who is entering this state,” says Evelyn Underhill, “the external world seems to get further and further away; till at last nothing but the paramount fact of his own existence remains.”⁶

In this form of religious experience, as in the others—I am suggesting—the mystic’s mind is being directly affected by the divine Reality; and this impact (or, in the cybernetic sense of the term, this “information”) comes to consciousness in forms provided by the constructive imagination of the recipient, fed by the concepts and symbols of his or her tradition. If there is (as I think that in fact there is) the kind of mental impact of one human mind upon another that is called telepathy, this provides a partial analogy to the impact of the presence of the Real upon human minds. In the case of visions and auditions the telepathic analogue is that of “crisis apparitions.” The literature of parapsychology from the days before radio communication contains numerous cases of this. Typically, a man travelling or working abroad, say, in India, is unexpectedly killed in some accident. It takes two or three weeks for the news to reach his wife in England by the normal channels. But during the night immediately after the accident she has a vivid dream or a waking vision that symbolises his death. This may take a variety of forms: a dream or an apparition of her husband looking still and deathlike, or of a coffin or other symbol of death, or of receiving an announcement of his death, and so on.⁷ In such a case it seems reasonable to suppose that in the moment of crisis the husband’s state of mind telepathically affected that of his wife at an unconscious level and that (usually) at night,

⁵. *Showings*, short text, trans. Edmund Colledge and James Walsh (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), chap. 3.

⁶. *Mysticism* (1911; reprint, New York: New American Library, 1955), 318.

⁷. For actual accounts see, e.g., F.W.H. Myers, *Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death* (1903; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1975).

when her attention was withdrawn from the outer world, this “information” came to her consciousness by means of the mechanism by which ordinary dreams are created. In the case of mystical experiences, however, the source of the information is the universal presence of the Transcendent, the Divine, to which the mystic is exceptionally open; and this impact comes to consciousness through the basic religious concepts and the specific concrete symbols of the mystic’s tradition.

What, however, of unitive mysticism? Does not this fall outside any analysis of religious experience as involving the interpretive concepts of the experiencer? For it would seem that here, without the mediation of the world or of either outer or inner visions, there is a direct experience of being absorbed into or becoming one with God, the One, the Divine. As Meister Eckhart, perhaps the greatest of the Christian unitive mystics, expressed it, “When the divine light pours into the soul, the soul is united with God, as light blends with light.”⁸ Reflecting on such experiences, Eckhart says, “If I am to know God directly, I must become completely He and He I: so that this He and this I become and are one.”⁹ And so he says that “God and I are One. . . . I am the unmoved Mover, that moves all things.”¹⁰ This parallels the famous *ana al-haqq* (I am the Real, i.e., God) of the great Muslim mystic al-Hallaj.

From the standpoint of orthodox Christian or Muslim theology, the mystic’s sense of union with God can only be subjective. For the creature remains for ever ontologically distinct from and dependent for existence upon the Creator. Thus Bernard of Clairvaux, speaking of the “unitive” state, says,

How can there be unity where there is plurality of natures and difference of substances? The union of God and man is brought about not by confusion of natures, but by agreement of wills. Man and God, because they are not one substance or nature, cannot be called “one

⁸. Meister Eckhart, trans. Raymond B. Blakney (New York: Harper and Row, 1941), sermon 14, 163.

⁹. Sermon 99, quoted in Underhill, *Mysticism*, 420.

¹⁰. Blakney, *Meister Eckhart*, sermon 28, 232.

thing” . . . but they are with strict truth called “one spirit” if they adhere to one another with the glue of love.¹¹

Thus, the language of total and unqualified unity is, from this point of view, either rhetorical exaggeration or heresy. In the cases of Eckhart and al-Hallaj their respective political-religious authorities persecuted them for these statements, and al-Hallaj was even executed.

On the other hand, parallel statements by advaitic Hindu mystics are entirely acceptable within their tradition. Thus, in the *Crest Jewell of Discrimination (Viveka-Chudamani)*, attributed to Shankara, we read, “The ego has disappeared. I have realized my identity with Brahman. . . . My mind fell like a hailstone into that vast expanse of Brahman’s ocean. Touching one drop of it, I melted away and became one with Brahman.”¹²

However, this notion of a direct unitive experience of the Real, the One, the Divine, gives rise to an epistemological dilemma. An experience that is reported, and that has therefore been remembered, even if it cannot be adequately captured in words, is by definition an episode in the history of the reporter: the mystic undergoes the experience and is subsequently able to remember having had it. But in that case it seems that the mystic must never have ceased to exist as a distinct stream of consciousness. There can have been no losing of identity through becoming totally merged into the Infinite. For if the finite consciousness of the mystic had been dissolved in the Infinite, like a drop of water becoming part of the ocean, there would be no continuous thread of finite consciousness such as is required for an individual memory of the experience. We therefore seem driven to conclude either that the remembered “unitive experience” was not truly unitive or that if the mystic was indeed absorbed into a truly unitive state, this cannot have been, properly speaking, an experience undergone by the mystic, since he or she could then have no memory of it.

It therefore seems to me that the remembered experience, which is subsequently spoken of as unitary, must have been the experience

¹¹. *Sermons on the Canticles*, sermon 71. See also Saint John of the Cross, *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, bk. 2, chap. 5, and John Tauler’s “First Sermon for the Second Sunday of the Epiphany” in *The Graces of Interior Prayer*, comp. A. Poulain, pt. 2, chap. 18.

¹². 3d ed., trans. Swami Prabhvananda and Christopher Isherwood (Los Angeles: Vedanta Press, 1978), 113.

of a continuing finite consciousness, though one in which the entire field of consciousness became filled, in the case of a theistic mystic, by the presence of God, and in the case of the advaitic mystic, by the universal reality of Brahman. For it would seem that when a human self has attained to a sufficient transcendence of the ego and its concerns it may become so open to the Divine, the Real, the Ultimate as to undergo moments in which the consciousness is totally filled with the transcendent Reality. But the fact that this “unitive” experience takes both theistic and non-theistic forms (and sub-varieties of each) suggests that the finite consciousness of the mystic has carried with it into this moment the basic conceptual structure whereby it experiences the Real, in some cases as a personal and in other cases as a non-personal reality.

I am suggesting, then, that religious experience in all its forms is a mode of consciousness that occurs when someone is freely (though not necessarily by conscious volition) open and responsive to the universal presence of the transcendent Reality. The impact of this presence comes to consciousness as a mode of experience whose specific forms are provided by the experiencer’s religious concepts and symbols. This, of course, would explain how it can be that Christians have distinctively Christian forms of religious experience, Muslims distinctively Islamic forms, Hindus distinctively Hindu forms, and so on.

But let us now look at the same range of phenomena from a naturalistic point of view, which denies that there is any transcendent Reality to evoke these forms of experience. A naturalistic philosophy must hold that religious experience is internally generated. Instead of religious concepts being used to give form to our awareness of a transcendent impact upon us, they are used to shape the products of our own creative imaginations, the (unconscious) motive behind their production being primarily reassurance in the face of our inescapable finitude, vulnerability, and mortality.

Since the same reported experiences occur on either a religious or a naturalistic view, wherein lies the difference between situations in which the one or the other of these views is true? What is the difference between there being and there not being a transcendent divine Reality that is a factor, in collaboration with our human conceptual systems, in the genesis of religious experience? The answer must lie, not in the nature of the experiences themselves as describable phenomena, but in the implications of their rival construals for the larger structure of the universe considered as entailing the possibility of

further experiences. If a religious account of the universe is true, the universe is so structured as to give rise to human experiences in the future that will not occur if a naturalistic account is true. For each of the great traditions teaches that our present earthly life is only a small segment of our total existence. Each tradition speaks of an ultimate eschatological state, variously pictured as heaven or hell, paradise, oneness with the infinite consciousness of Brahman, or a nirvanic state beyond individual ego-existence. Whilst there are these, and yet other, pictures and symbols, strong strands of each tradition regard the ultimate state as lying beyond the range of our earthly concepts. However, each also speaks in more concrete terms of the *parashaton* (the phase or phases between this life and that ultimate state) in which we continue to exist as individual persons, being either resurrected or reborn in this or other worlds, or going through some kind of purgatorial experience or “continued sanctification after death.” We do not have to choose between these different *parashatologies* in order to see that if any one of them is correct a purely naturalistic understanding of the universe must be incorrect. Indeed, this is still the case if none of them is correct in its specific expectations and yet all are correct in their common affirmation of continued personal existence beyond the present life. It could further be the case that as we proceed into whatever unexpected form our continued existence takes, we find that a religious, as distinguished from a naturalistic, understanding of the universe is progressively confirmed whilst the particular conceptualization of that religious understanding is itself progressively revised or transcended. It is at any rate clear that the wider sets of beliefs and expectations that cohere respectively with a religious and with a naturalistic construal of religious awareness are very different and cannot both be compatible with the full range of human experience.

Needless to say, I have in these last remarks only touched upon a very large field for speculation. There can be a variety of possible complications of this picture, modifying naturalism in the religious direction. But I am only concerned here to make the general point that the rival understandings of religious experience are integral to radically different conceptions of the larger character of the universe, involving different expectations concerning the context and the content of future human experience.

The claim that religious experiences connect with expectations of some kind of life after death does nothing, of course, to establish the truth of this larger conception of the universe. It does, however, show

that whilst religious and naturalistic believers can agree in granting that the various reported forms of religious experience occur, their different understandings of those experiences are such that if the religious understanding turns out to be correct the naturalistic understanding will thereby have been shown to be false.

In the meantime, the two construals of religious experience—as cognitive in humanly varying ways of a transcendent Reality, and as purely a product of the human imagination—connect with different forms of life, different ways of inhabiting the world. These often have considerable overlap on the physical and ethical levels of meaning. But they differ basically in their understanding of the overall character of the universe and hence of what is going on in and through the entire phenomenon of human existence.

Each of these global interpretations constitutes an act of faith: the religious and the naturalistic believer must both be said to “walk by faith.” The religious believer is living in terms of a meaning that may prove to be substantially true or may be an illusion; and the naturalistic believer is living in terms of a meaning that may be true or may prove to be an illusion. And we have to say that both are at present entitled to believe as they do, and that each is taking a cognitive risk in so doing.

Faith and the Limitations of Open-Mindedness

Basil Mitchell

Terence Penelhum in the introduction to his collection of essays on faith writes: "What makes the rationality of faith problematic? To most philosophers the answer will seem obvious: the rationality of faith is problematic because faith is persistent conviction that is not founded upon adequate evidence."¹

Penelhum lists a number of attempted solutions to this problem, and it is one of them that I want to develop in this essay. It is the one that argues, in his formulation, that "faith needs some kind of rational justification . . . and this justification is available because religious faith resembles secular commitments that are justified by their results."²

In an earlier attempt to come to grips with this problem I distinguished two senses of "faith."³ The first, faith₁, occurs in non-religious as well as religious contexts. It is belief maintained in the face of difficulties and temptations. The second, faith₂, is uniquely religious. This is the sense of faith as trusting reliance upon God.

The difficulties and temptations that may beset faith₁ are of two kinds. Belief may be hard to maintain not because the evidence no longer supports it or because its consistency or coherence is in doubt, but on account of circumstances that make it difficult to behave like a rational being at all. In a stormy sea one may have every reason to believe that the ship is seaworthy, the captain and crew conscientious and competent, and so on, yet be hard put to it to go on believing that the ship will reach harbour safely. I have always believed, on reliable authority, that Great Danes, in spite of their enormous size, are

1. Penelhum, ed., *Faith* (New York: Macmillan, 1989), 1.

2. *Ibid.*, 3.

3. See my *The Justification of Religious Belief* (London: Macmillan, 1973), 139.

amiable and, indeed, sentimental creatures by nature, but when confronted recently by two such beasts slaving with apparent fury behind a massive iron gate, which was then caused to open gradually before me by some hidden mechanism, I had great difficulty in maintaining that belief. (A moment later they were nuzzling my armpits in a quite embarrassing display of affection.) But it may also be hard to maintain belief because there are, or seem to the individual for the time being to be, observations or arguments that cast doubt on what is believed. Yet people habitually do, and arguably should, continue to believe notwithstanding; and this whether the belief is religious or not. I went on to claim that it is only in the case of religious faith that faith is rightly said to be unconditional. And here what is intended is faith₂: “The theist is bound to maintain his trust in God’s goodness and mercy no matter what dangers and difficulties confront him.”⁴ But, I argued, it does not follow from this that the corresponding faith₁—belief that there is a God and that he is trustworthy—must also be unconditional and in no circumstances to be given up. Suppose a backwoodsman in a remote area of Quebec has always professed unconditional loyalty to the king of France. He comes one day to Montreal and learns for the first time that there is no king of France and it is a hundred and fifty years since there last was one. His loyalty to the king of France, unconditional though it is, does not require him to go on believing that there is a king of France in spite of conclusive evidence to the contrary. (I ignore complications about the comte de Paris.)

Nevertheless, this distinction only goes some way to meet the common criticism of religious faith. For in religious matters faith, even if not (in the sense of faith₁) unconditional, typically goes well beyond the evidence invoked to justify it; and it is hard to see how one could trust unconditionally a being in whose existence one did not wholeheartedly believe. If religious faith is to be defended against the sort of criticism Penelhum has in mind, it is necessary to find secular analogies that illustrate the two features that attract criticism: that belief is maintained when the evidence is comparatively weak or even at times contrary; and that, nevertheless, it is wholehearted. Or, as he himself puts it, “faith is persistent conviction that is not founded upon adequate evidence.” If one could discover, and defend, such secular analogies, this would not provide a complete vindication of

⁴. Ibid.

religious faith—for it might be objected to on other grounds—but it would suffice to rebut this particular criticism.

In my book I began by instancing the “principle of tenacity” recognized by philosophers of science in virtue of which scientists do not allow their confidence in the fundamental laws of their science (as currently understood) to be shaken by temporary set-backs, even apparently quite serious ones. One can, indeed, go further and claim that there is scarcely a major breakthrough in modern science that did not require its author at some stage to persevere with the theory in the face of severe criticism and even ridicule. Hence Stanley Jaki quotes Max Planck:

Science demands also the believing spirit. Anybody who has been seriously engaged in scientific work of any kind realizes that over the entrance gates of the temple of science are written the words: “Ye must have faith.” It is a quality the scientists cannot dispense with.⁵

This is a useful corrective to the common stereotype of the scientist as never going beyond the evidence, but it does not provide a close enough analogy with religious faith. Often, in the scientific case, there is no alternative framework available with a plausible claim to make better sense of the evidence, so that it is a fairly obvious requirement of effective scientific policy to stay with the present one; and there is an equally strong pragmatic case for the toleration, and indeed encouragement, of bold innovators.

However, the case is altered when we consider the social sciences and the humanities. Here controversy is endemic. It is a common experience for practitioners of these disciplines to find themselves confronted by arguments and observations that threaten their present position and that they cannot for the time being see how to counter. In these areas schools of thought arise that both their supporters and their opponents can see to have a rational structure based upon a plausible interpretation of the available evidence. Although some of them may in fact be better based than their rivals, they are not unchallengeably so. Given that the evidence is complex and the scheme of thought developed over time, the individual who subscribes to it adheres to an identifiable tradition and must to some extent rely for his or her understanding of it upon the authority of others. Although that individual recognizes, or should recognize, that it could turn out to be in important respects erroneous, he or she

⁵. Jaki, “The Role of Faith in Physics,” *Zygon* 2 (1967).

cannot in practice avoid a decision as to whether to adhere to the tradition and allow it to influence the policy and practice of academic work. Examples are not hard to find: the continuing debate about the relative importance of genetic and environmental factors in the psychological and social sciences; the conflict between orthodox sociology and sociobiology, and between Marxist and liberal strands in sociology itself. In philosophy and literary criticism the phenomenon is too obvious to require illustration. In all such cases, the rival schools of thought typically possess a massive coherence in virtue of which it would be quite unreasonable for their adherents to be at all ready to abandon them, or revise them radically, in the face of difficulties that may prove only temporary.

This is the case even when the concerns of academics are purely theoretical. Academics need a coherent and reliable framework of thought if they are to make a worthwhile contribution to their subject, and in the circumstances of academic life pressures to commit oneself to a definite line are considerable. Some may determine to remain entirely open-minded and, insofar as they develop a particular approach, to do so tentatively and provisionally, but such detachment is in practice comparatively rare. Not only is it hard to pursue a line of thought vigorously and tenaciously with no investment of emotional energy, but, in an academic arena that is inevitably competitive, there is need for like-thinking allies, to whom a certain loyalty is then owed. People unacquainted with universities generally assume that scholars are open-minded people who observe in their dealings with one another a cool and detached impartiality. The reality is not at all like this. Because there are different approaches possible to any subject and parties form in order to promote them, the individual scholar tends to internalize the attitudes and assumptions characteristic of some particular approach.

But very often academic subjects provide the basis for practical policies, most conspicuously in medicine, social work, and education. It then becomes necessary to decide which of the more or less disputed theories currently available are to be taken as the guide to practice. To take a typical example, the psychological theories of Piaget about the cognitive development of children have influenced an entire generation of educational practitioners. They have reinforced the influence of Dewey and others in favour of allowing children to determine their own rate of progress, and have militated against formal procedures of learning and testing.

It is easy, especially when such a fashion is coming to an end, as this one is, to criticize the willingness of so many highly intelligent

people to follow the trend unhesitatingly. Yet something of the sort was almost bound to happen, given the imperatives of practical choice. Unless scientific opinion is to be entirely ignored, a decision has to be made between competing theories and, once it has been made, a massive orthodoxy is bound to develop, which it will be hard for individuals to resist. Moreover, in the process the personalities of those involved are, as a rule, profoundly affected. By contrast with the older, more authoritarian, type of schoolteacher, providing instruction from a secure platform of accepted values, the newer teacher is flexible and non-judgemental as befits the newer theories. No wonder he or she is deeply disturbed when the latter are radically challenged.

What has been said applies even more obviously to world-views or philosophies of life, for these are not only practical but comprehensive. They afford a "faith to live by," and they claim in principle to embrace the whole of our experience. These two features, taken together, intensify the problems previously mentioned: the unavailability of choice, the difficulty of assessing the overall case, the individual's dependence on authority, and the likelihood of encountering serious challenges.

To sum up the argument so far: The conditions of human life are such that, in all matters of importance to us, we have to choose (or act as if we had chosen) between competing schemes of thought, which have varying degrees of rational support, but which cannot be shown to be true beyond all dispute. Our choice determines not only what we do, but who we are. In this predicament it is not sensible, or indeed possible, to be forever changing our stance, because in that case we should not adhere to our convictions long enough to put them to the test, or to effect worthwhile changes in the world, or to develop for ourselves a consistent character. So there is need for a robust faith in virtue of which we can hold to our course when the going gets difficult, as sooner or later it always does.

Penelhum suggested that the rationality of faith is problematic "because faith is persistent conviction that is not founded on adequate evidence," and he envisaged that a justification might be available "because religious faith resembles secular commitments that are justified by their results." What I have tried to do is to develop this sort of justification by indicating the extent to which people's convictions generally tend to be persistent and are often not founded on adequate evidence. But it is plainly not enough to show that religious and secular convictions resemble one another in this respect, and that their doing so is to be expected given the circum-

stances of human life. For it may still be objected that the phenomenon is part of the anatomy of human weakness: understandable but not justifiable. We have to ask to what extent such convictions are, as Penelhum put it, “justified by their results.” If convictions are to be regarded as in any sense rational, it is evident that those who hold them cannot remain indifferent to their status with regard to the evidence; otherwise those people are in the grip of unreasoned prejudice. In the typical situation we have envisaged, in which it begins to appear that there are observations or well-supported theories that are incompatible with, or cannot adequately be explained by, the system as it stands, something needs to be done. There seem to be three strategies available if adherence to the system is to be maintained:

- i.* To cast doubt on the discrepant observations or theories;
- ii.* To accept these and introduce modifications of the structure in order to protect the more fundamental parts of it;
- iii.* let the ends hang loose: i.e., to do nothing for the time being in the hope that in due course the situation will become clearer.

Any of these strategies may be preferable to abandoning the system altogether. The justification for adopting one or other of these strategies would, according to Penelhum’s formulation, have to be in terms of results. So we need to ask what sort of results are in question.

I propose to discuss two possible sorts of result. One would be the achievement of fuller truth; the other would be some other benefit in addition to this.

1. The Achievement of Fuller Truth

The classic exposition of “experimental faith” as a means of discovering truth is to be found in William James’s *The Will to Believe*. James argues that “a rule of thinking which would absolutely prevent me from acknowledging certain kinds of truth, if those certain kinds of truth were really there, would be an irrational rule.”⁶ The rule he has in mind is that expressed in W.K. Clifford’s celebrated dictum: “It is

⁶. *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (London: Longmans, Green, 1902), 28.

wrong always, everywhere, and for everyone to believe anything upon insufficient evidence.”⁷

On the contrary, James maintains, if promising hypotheses are to be adequately tested, one must be prepared to persevere with them over a reasonable period of time. Otherwise, healthy brain children may be killed off by premature antisepsis. Moreover, there are in life certain choices that are “lively, forced and momentous,” with respect to which the option of suspending judgement is not available. Moral choices and choices of one’s entire philosophy of life are among these. When what is at stake is the possibility of coming to know and love a personal God, the need for an initial commitment is even greater and more obvious, so that James’s argument lends particular support to a distinctively theistic faith.

The argument gains additional support from John Stuart Mill in his plea for freedom of speech. He observes that, in general, truth is better served by having a variety of systems of belief in vigorous competition with one another than by allowing the expression only of what is currently held to be the truth. This policy favours the optimum development of the rival systems by encouraging creativity and ensuring the exposure of each of them to the most determined criticism.

If the policies of James and Mill are to succeed, two extremes are to be avoided. One is dogmatism, understood as a state of mind that is impervious to criticism. A system of belief dogmatically adhered to will simply ossify, and will not undergo those modifications which are necessary, in changing circumstances, to maintaining its identity. The other is complete open-mindedness: the putative system will be subject to so many fluctuations as not to develop a coherent identity at all.

In the light of these considerations, it seems that the tendency of people to develop persistent convictions that are not founded upon adequate evidence is not only a widespread phenomenon, but one that is justified as a means to discovering truth. Truth is more likely to be found if people join together in developing a set of ideas with a considerable degree of perseverance than if they allow their opinions to fluctuate readily in response to changes in the evidence.

It may be objected that what this line of argument shows is something less than is being claimed for it. Granted that the most profitable strategy for the discovery of truth may often involve a

⁷. Quoted by James, *ibid.*, 8.

readiness to go beyond the evidence, it does not require belief, let alone conviction. All that is needed is an “experimental faith,” a readiness to act *as if* the relevant propositions were true, rather than actually to believe them. Indeed, some philosophers would claim that belief is involuntary and, moreover, as Swinburne puts it, “to believe that p is to believe that p is more probable than any alternative.”⁸ Hence, if someone claims to believe that there is a God while at the same time admitting that public evidence seems to count against that belief, that person must be taken to mean either that the public evidence has been wrongly assessed or that he or she has private evidence. If, then, the person were to commit to the proposition that there is a God in the way James proposes, while acknowledging that in so doing he or she goes beyond the available evidence, that individual’s state of mind could not properly be called belief.

In order to take the measure of this objection, we need to remind ourselves once again of the sort of situation in which such faith is required. It is one in which the system of thought to which one adheres is under challenge. While it is true that there is a tight connection of the sort Swinburne posits between belief and evidence in the case of straightforward empirical statements, it is not so when what is at stake is the choice of an entire interpretative system that will to some extent determine what is to count as evidence. The cases in question are those in which, from the standpoint of such a system, things “look bad.” They are recognizably situations of temptation in which we acknowledge a duty not to give up prematurely as soon as the going gets difficult. As we have seen, the great pioneers of science and other disciplines were people who survived crises, sometimes prolonged, in which everything seemed to be against them. The problems of anyone thus situated are accentuated by the fact that among the things that morally tempt one to give up will be found some considerations that owe their effectiveness as temptations to their seeming to provide good reasons why we should do so—although in fact we should not. Even in academic life, in spite of its comparative calm, people are exposed to pressures that are not wholly rational and that sometimes, to make things worse, masquerade as rational. Intellectual fashions, for example, are very powerful, and so are academic reputations, and no one who has lived through a period of unremitting pressure can have failed to be aware how linguistic conventions and even facial expressions and tones of voice are brought

⁸. R. G. Swinburne, *Faith and Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 23.

into play to reinforce a particular line of thought. In such circumstances, when arguments are by such adventitious devices made to seem more persuasive than they are, it is far from easy to make at all times a calm and rational assessment of the state of the argument. If the position you represent is to have any chance at all of making good its claims, you will have to hang on to it, suspecting that you cannot always take the considerations advanced against it at their face value and realizing that you are often unable here and now to undertake the cool and complete assessment that is ideally required. I want to adhere to that system of belief which, in some form or other, is most likely to turn out to be true in the long run. But how likely is it that I, situated as I am, with my known limitations and all the pressures upon me, am going to be able to make a just assessment of all the issues involved and distinguish clearly between what I have good reason to believe and what I am entertaining simply as a promising hypothesis? It may sometimes be feasible, if the outcome does not matter very much, to maintain this sort of detachment, but as a rule it is not humanly possible. Not experimental hypotheses but only persistent convictions will succeed in surviving the trial.

It is of course, as we have already seen, essential that the state of the evidence should be kept in review, if truth is indeed to be approached. Otherwise, weaknesses will not be recognized as weaknesses and corrections will not be made where they are needed. The individual who persists in a conviction when the evidence is, as it stands, inadequate, does at least believe that in the end, when all the evidence is gathered in, the conviction will in some recognizable form be vindicated.

In this section of the essay I have been considering a variety of reasons why a certain persistence in people's convictions is required if the chances of achieving, or at least approximating to, the truth are to be maximized. Some of the considerations I have mentioned involve psychological rather than strictly cognitive factors, but they are not unrelated to the latter. Human beings are not uniformly rational, and any policies directed to the discovery of truth must take this into account.

2. The Achievement of Salvation

Religion, unlike metaphysics, is not concerned solely with truth. It has to do primarily with liberation or salvation. And, in a broad enough sense of the words, this is the case also with secular world-views or philosophies of life insofar as they offer a faith to live by.

Each envisages an unsatisfactory state of affairs from which the individual needs to be “saved” or “liberated,” a means of effecting the rescue, and a final situation in the attainment of which the rescue consists. As Swinburne puts it, “There is in each case a way, a creed and a goal.”⁹

It follows from what has been said earlier that it is necessary to persist in one’s way for long enough to have a reasonable chance of attaining the goal. Since there are what look like other ways purporting to lead to the same or other goals, questions of truth are involved. Hence the need for the associated creed, which makes such factual claims as that:

1. Such and such a way will lead to such and such a goal. Where the goal is a purely internal one, for instance an experience of liberation, the creed can be simple and in little danger of being contradicted by scientific or historical evidence. When, as in Christianity, it is envisaged as the consummation of the entire historical process, there is an appreciable risk of a clash with scientific and historical knowledge. In such a case, belief that the way will lead to its intended goal presupposes that the world is so constituted as to make this possible.

2. Such and such a goal will prove ultimately satisfying. According to most philosophies of life and all religions, the goal includes the attainment of a certain state of character, if indeed it does not consist wholly in this; and the way involves the persistent attempt to develop the right sort of character (in Christian terms, sanctification). Any way will be beset by temptations of the sort we have already considered. The pilgrim will be under pressure to abandon the journey for reasons that will seem at the time convincing: that the way is getting him or her nowhere, that the goal is not worth the difficulties and dangers of achieving it, or is illusory or less worth striving for than some alternative. The predicament of any such pilgrim is that without perseverance no worthwhile goal can be achieved, yet he or she cannot have complete assurance of being on the right path to the right goal.

In decisions whether to persevere in a way or not, it will be relevant how valuable is the goal to which one hopes the way will lead and how stringent are the obligations it is believed to impose. This

⁹. *Ibid.*, 125.

consideration underlies the argument that, in different forms, is developed by Pascal and Butler, to the effect that the promise of a very great reward warrants a degree of perseverance commensurate with it. This is one reason why theistic belief inspires so great a measure of commitment. A personal God is both the fount of felicity and the source of obligation.

Insofar as one is more likely to follow a way with determination if one believes with full conviction that it will lead to the goal and that the goal is supremely worthwhile, there is reason to reinforce the belief so as to help one to achieve the goal. Hence the pragmatic justification of Pascal's advice about masses and holy water. Moreover, insofar as a certain state of character is constitutive of the goal, and in view of the reciprocal relationship between conviction and character, a considerable degree of commitment is unavoidable.

It will be apparent that, if this account is at all correct, there is an inevitable tension between faith and reason in that the pragmatic grounds for tenacity in belief are calculated to reinforce false beliefs as well as true ones. We have an interest both in deciding which are the right goals to seek and in pursuing the chosen way resolutely. The latter requirement cannot be met if we are too easily persuaded that we are on the wrong track; the former requirement cannot be met if we refuse to heed any signs that we are going astray.

I have spoken of this as an inevitable predicament, and in the conditions of human life it seems to be so. The predicament would be mitigated or even perhaps abolished altogether if it were possible to abandon either of the imperatives that generate it—if, that is, the demands of reason were abated or the need for commitment was denied. Kierkegaard and Clifford represent the extreme poles of this dichotomy. Kierkegaard seems to say that faith is meritorious precisely to the degree that it spurns the help of reason and embraces a claim that is objectively absurd. It would seem to follow that it does not ultimately matter what is the content of belief so long as it is adhered to with sufficient intensity, a conclusion that Kierkegaard does not himself draw, but that has continued to inspire a whole tradition of existentialism in philosophy and theology. It has the paradoxical consequence that the experience of faith's being tested in the fires of critical debate is one that cannot, in logic, occur. And the inadequacies of Clifford's demand that belief should at all times be strictly proportionate to the evidence currently available have been sufficiently exposed by Pascal, Butler, and James.

If then, the predicament is unavoidable, the question arises how a proper balance is to be achieved between the demands of criticism

and those of commitment. The argument suggests that to pursue a way blindly towards a goal that is inadequately apprehended will not achieve the desired ends and that, on the other hand, to allow oneself to be distracted from the pursuit of the chosen way whenever there seem to be indications, which may prove to be illusory, that one is being misled, will prevent any goal at all from being reached. I suggested earlier that there are various strategies open to the believer when confronted by contrary evidence. They all presuppose that some modification of the creed may in fact be demanded, together with variations in the way. The creed functions as a guide to one's steps, and it will not do that properly if signs and warnings are systematically ignored. There must, then, be a process by which pilgrims are able to correct their maps and check their compasses as they go along, a process that calls for alert attention to the scene as well as resolute determination not to be misled by false signals or weakened by disturbing emotions.

I am suggesting, then, that Christian faith is not alone in its character as "persistent conviction that is not founded upon adequate evidence," and that it does "resemble secular commitments that are justified by their results." It does not, of course, follow that there are no significant differences between faith in Christian and secular contexts. It would go beyond the limits of this essay to suggest what these might be, but two of them may be mentioned.

The first is that the demands of faith₂—of trusting reliance upon God—may well strengthen the obligation to maintain belief in God when the evidence is fluctuating or uncertain. For loyalty is involved, and an obvious temptation to disloyalty is that of accepting too readily that God does not exist or is not to be trusted. Perhaps there is, after all, a secular analogy to this. The backwoodsman from Quebec should not go on believing that there is a king of France when doubt is no longer possible, but neither should he be too readily convinced otherwise, given that one obvious way of seducing him from his loyalty would be to spread false rumours of the king's demise.

The other difference between Christian and secular faith is that, as James insisted, to the extent that an experimental faith in God succeeds in its object, it becomes a matter of coming to know and love him, and this, like trusting him, implies certain beliefs about his nature, his character and purposes. However firm these beliefs may be, they remain liable to be shaken by experience, and the need to hold on to them in the face of temptation is correspondingly greater

than would be the case with some entirely secular set of convictions, in which no personal relationship was involved.

Criticisms of a Cosmological Argument

H.A. Meynell

There is a kind of cosmological argument for the existence of God that has been subjected to a number of criticisms in recent philosophical literature. It argues from the alleged fact that the world is intelligible, to the existence of something at the basis of the world of the nature of an intelligent will. Professor Jack MacIntosh has roundly asserted that the supposed intelligibility does not exist in the world, at least in the sense alleged; that even if it did, it would not require an explanation; and that even if it existed and required explanation, explanation in terms of something like an intelligent will would not work.¹ Related objections have been put forward by Dr. R.M. Burns, Professor Ronald Hepburn, and Dr. Harry Stopes-Roe.² A defence of the argument in the face of these objections would have to bring out in just what sense the universe is intelligible, to show that its being intelligible in this sense needs an explanation, and to indicate that the most satisfactory available explanation is the existence of something like the intelligent will that is roughly what most people have meant by "God."

It may be felt that to harp on the intelligibility of the universe is merely to brand oneself as a recalcitrant metaphysician who has somehow missed out on the last three or so of the revolutions in philosophy. So it seems worth quoting a recent writer on contemporary physics:

1. "A Reasonable Belief?" in *Religion and Irreligion*, ed. H.A. Meynell (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1985), 71.

2. Burns, "Meynell's Arguments for the Intelligibility of the Universe," *Religious Studies* 23 (1987); Hepburn, "Remarks," in *Reason and Religion*, ed. S. C. Brown (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977); and Stopes-Roe, "The Intelligibility of the Universe," in *Reason and Religion*.

Perhaps the most basic assumption which underlies all of physics, and indeed all of science in the sense in which the word is currently understood, is that the world is in principle susceptible to understanding by human beings; that if we fail to understand a given phenomenon, then the fault is in us, not in the world, and that some day someone cleverer than ourselves will show us how to do it. Of course, exactly what is meant by “understanding” is itself a subtle question. . . . However, it seems clear that unless we had some such belief, there would be little point in even trying to carry out scientific research at all.”³

To hold either that the world is intelligible or that its intelligibility is something that has to be accounted for is to be committed to something like the notorious principle of sufficient reason. This rules that there are no mere “brute facts” without explanation in the world. But anyone who appeals to the principle of sufficient reason, especially in the context of arguments for the existence of God, would do well to take into account the lapidary statement of Terence Penelhum: “Why does anything exist at all?” is “a total question. . . . It is logically impossible to explain *everything*. The Principle of Sufficient Reason is demonstrably false.”⁴ In *that* form, the principle is certainly false, for the reasons that Professor Penelhum gives. Still, I hope to show that a form of the principle of sufficient reason may be worked out and defended that does not lead to such obviously unacceptable conclusions.

According to the late J.L. Mackie, “The principle of sufficient reason expresses a demand that things should be intelligible *through and through*. The simple reply to the argument that relies on it is that there is nothing that justifies this demand, and nothing that supports the belief that it is satisfiable, even in principle.”⁵ But I think this claim neglects the vital connection that would seem to subsist between establishing that a fact or state of affairs actually exists on the one hand, and setting it within an intelligible framework along with other facts and states of affairs on the other. One might pertinently ask what it would *be* for a putative fact to be a real fact, let alone for it to be capable of being apprehended by us as such,

³. A.J. Leggett, *The Problems of Physics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 31.

⁴. “Divine Necessity,” in *The Cosmological Arguments*, ed. D.R. Burrill (New York: Doubleday, 1967), 154–55.

⁵. *The Miracle of Theism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 85. Compare MacIntosh, “A Reasonable Belief?”, 83.

without its being within such a framework, related to other facts within a nexus of cause and effect. David Hume maintained that to come to knowledge of any matter of fact whatever is to fit it into a causal series of which the term is present or remembered experience.⁶ Though one might quarrel with some of the conclusions that Hume drew from his principle, it seems acceptable at least as a first approximation. What could it possibly be for an investigator to have adequate reason for asserting the reality of a state of affairs that persistently refused to fit into any explanatory structure such as could be justified by appeal to her experience? What would it be for such a state of affairs to obtain at all? And—to press a point made by Hume in connection with miracles—would not the acknowledgement of such states of affairs implicitly invalidate all our ordinary processes of reasoning from evidence to facts?⁷ If I acknowledge the occurrence of any fact that is “brute” in the sense of not having been connected as effect with any prior facts as causes, why should not the evidence of my senses be just another such “brute fact”? But if it is so, I cannot use it to infer the reality of other facts, for this kind of inference depends on causal connections.⁸ We are now in a position to see, I think, why and in what sense the demand that things should be intelligible through and through might be justified.

As Ronald Hepburn remarks, merely to say that the facts of the world are patient of description is not to make a claim capable of bearing much philosophical weight; on the other hand, it seems to be too much to say that the world is intelligible in the strong sense that it has the structure of a logical calculus.⁹ However, I believe that too much fuss has been made over the supposed difficulty of conceiving what could be meant by saying that the world is intelligible. Not so

⁶ David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. L.A. Sellby-Bigge and P.H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), IV.i.21–22.

⁷ *Ibid.*, X. It should be noted that the non-existence of facts without explanation does not impugn the possibility of miracles of the kind attested by the New Testament; such events, if they happen, are to be characterised as subject to a certain *kind of* explanation, rather than to no explanation at all. As Augustine says, when God carries on in the world in the manner habitual with God, we call it nature; when God acts in a strikingly exceptional manner for our instruction or admonition, we call it a miracle (*De Trinitate* iii.5; compare my *God and the World* [London: SPCK, 1971], 85).

⁸ This seems to be a sufficient rebuttal of Hepburn’s suggestion that there might “be certain problematic elements in the world whose *existence* we might indeed be able to acknowledge intellectually, but which we were quite unable to integrate rationally with other and well-understood elements of our knowledge of nature” (“Remarks,” 75–76).

⁹ *Ibid.*, “Remarks,” 76, 72.

many centuries ago, human beings knew by experience about a vast range of things *that* they occurred, but had no very satisfactory accounts of *why* they occurred. Now, as a result of inquiry by learned persons over a number of generations, we have the theoretical structures of physics, chemistry, evolutionary biology, and so on, which provide us with explanations of *why* things are as they are and happen as they do. Two features in particular of these theoretical structures are important for our purposes here. First, they seem to provide us with knowledge of things as they are and would be independent of our experience, and not merely in immediate relation to our experience. Second, while they are verified by reference to what is perceivable, the elements in which they consist do not correspond very closely with what can in any useful sense be said to be perceived. To say that the world is intelligible is to say that it is subject to explanation in theoretical terms that do not correspond directly with what can be immediately perceived. An unintelligible theory is a theory by courtesy only.

The principle of sufficient reason has often been understood (as, in effect, it was by Hume¹⁰) to imply determinism, and also the absurd view that all coincidences have to be explained just as such. But taken in the way that I have suggested, neither of these conclusions follows from it. If the implications of contemporary physics are indeterministic, as it appears they are, then this does not impugn the principle of sufficient reason in the sense in which I am concerned with it.¹¹ As so understood it implies only that attempts to find theoretical explanations of phenomena will be successful, not that such explanations will have to be of a deterministic kind. One may give an account of why something—say, the evolution of the goldcrest, or the emission by a radioactive atom of an alpha particle—was *liable* or *able* to happen when it did, without necessarily being able to explain why it *could not but* have occurred when it did. We are quite used to such explanations, after all, in our dealings with human agents; to explain why you went to dinner last Friday as and when you did is not to explain why you *could not but* have gone to dinner last Friday exactly as and when you did. To complain that the former kind of explanation is incomplete as compared with the latter is to beg the

¹⁰. *Enquiry* VIII.i.74.

¹¹. Compare MacIntosh, “A Reasonable Belief?”, 83. Compare also Burns, “Meynell’s Arguments,” 195–96. The thesis that everything is in principle intelligible is not understood without nuances and qualifications such as are exemplified in this paragraph.

question whether explanation that is complete in this sense is available in such matters. Nor does the principle of sufficient reason, when understood in the sense that I am proposing, eliminate the status of coincidences as coincidences. Certainly, as Ullin Place has remarked,¹² to expect an explanation of all coincidences as coincidences is the royal road to unbridled superstition. Suppose I am walking along a street and a chimney-pot happens to fall on my head. An explanation of why I came to be at that place at that time, and another explanation of why the chimney-pot fell then and there, is quite sufficient; no supplementary explanation is needed (for example, the malign influence of an adept in witchcraft) to explain why the chimney-pot fell at the instant when I was passing beneath.

It has been objected that explanation is such a multifarious business that it is misleading to say that what is real is that which provides the most satisfactory explanation of experience.¹³ But I believe that, although the forms of explanation by which we establish what is the case in natural science, in history, and in the affairs of common sense differ somewhat from one another, there is a unity among them that is significant. There is no area of inquiry dealing with matters of fact¹⁴ where one does not tend to get at the truth by attending to the evidence of experience, by envisaging possibilities to account for that evidence, and by judging at least provisionally to be the case the possibility that is best supported by that evidence. Again, that theories are, as it has been expressed, underdetermined by the evidence relevant to their truth does not affect the issue.¹⁵ The fact remains that some theories as to why things appear to be as they are, are *better* supported than others; that whereas some possibilities are more or less falsified by the relevant evidence, others are more or less corroborated by it. Unless it is admitted that some accounts of the nature of things are better supported by the relevant evidence than are others, all knowledge, even the knowledge that knowledge is impossible, falls to the ground. For on what basis could one reasonably assert that knowledge is impossible, except that it is the

¹². In conversation.

¹³. MacIntosh, "A Reasonable Belief?", 76.

¹⁴. I prescind here from the case of mathematics, having no need to take sides on the difficult question of how far mathematics deals with facts of special kinds and how far it is a creation of the human mind.

¹⁵. Compare MacIntosh, "A Reasonable Belief?", 77.

possibility that is better supported by the relevant evidence than is its contradictory?

What is the force of the statement that the world is intelligible?¹⁶ Is it merely that we can in principle conceptualize it? And what reason is there for supposing that it can even in principle be conceptualized? To say that the real world is intelligible has a bearing not merely on the *fact* that it may be conceptualized, but also on the *manner* of its conceptualization. As has already been said, when inquiries into the nature of things in the world reach beyond a certain point of sophistication, they come to be conducted in terms that do not correspond directly to experience, but that form parts of theories that may be corroborated by reference to experience. Force, mass, and acceleration as defined by Newton's law do not correspond directly to anything that may become the direct object of sensory experience; however, their reality is abundantly corroborated by such experience. And no one ever perceives biological species evolving one from another; people rightly judge that species have evolved from one another, as the possibility that best explains what they can perceive. However, while theories may be verified in experience for all that their constitutive elements cannot be perceived, a theory that is not grasped by the understanding of its proponent, and is hence not intelligible, is a mere jumble of words.

Moreover, there is every reason to believe that intelligible theories, as they are progressively corrected and refined in the light of evidence, come closer and closer to a true description of reality, of the world as it actually is. For what ultimately coherent conception can we have of "reality," or of "the world as it actually is," except as what tends to be affirmed by our judgements so far as they are persistently and rigorously corrected in the light of experience? It is by such correction and assumed approximation that such contrasts as that between "reality" and "appearance," or between "the actual world" and "the world as wrongly conceived by such-a-such a person or group," acquire their meaning for us. "Reality" can certainly turn out, on the basis of fresh evidence, to be incompatible with the theories about it that we hold now; but how could it even amount to "reality" unless it was at least in principle amenable to theoretical description, available as the end result of a process of correction with which we are already to some extent acquainted? A person in a Stone Age culture can make no sense of modern science; but at least she knows

¹⁶. Stopes-Roe, "The Intelligibility of the Universe," 46.

what it is both successfully to infer a state of affairs (say, a tiger's approach) from evidence and to make a mistake in doing so—mental operations that issue in science when carried through in a thoroughgoing way. As was pointed out by Fichte and Hegel, a real world consisting of Kantian “things in themselves,” with no relation to what we could ever conceivably find out about by the use of our intelligence and reason on the basis of our experience, turns out on the last analysis to be an incoherent conception. And just the same would appear to apply to unintelligible aspects of the world; allegedly real states of affairs that were neither potential objects of experience, nor such that they could even in principle be apprehended by intelligible theory verified in experience, could not have what it takes to be real states of affairs.¹⁷

I have drawn a contrast between the real world and the world of appearance and have argued, in effect, that the real world is (1) independent of our senses, but intelligible on the basis of them, (2) characterized by properties that do not correspond directly to our sensations, and (3) to be progressively known by the methods and through the theories of science. This contrast is evidently quite closely related to Locke's notorious contrast between the “primary qualities” that really belong to things and the “secondary qualities” that merely appear to belong to them owing to the manner in which such qualities affect our sense organs. Jack MacIntosh will have it that to envisage the matter in this way is curiously old-fashioned and takes insufficient account of developments in philosophy since the eighteenth century.¹⁸ Yet it is remarkable how little the central bone of contention seems to have changed between the eighteenth century and the present. Now as then, there are the followers of Locke who maintain that the properties ascribed to material objects by physical

¹⁷. Compare Hepburn's suggestion that the world might be incompletely intelligible (“Remarks,” 75). It might indeed be the case, so far as I can judge, that there were worlds or part-worlds or world-aspects that could not be intelligently grasped even in principle on the basis of *human* experience. But unless they had some actual or potential relation to the sensation or intellectual grasp of *some* conceivable being or beings, I do not see how they could amount to worlds or part-worlds or world-aspects at all. Compare also Burns, “Meynell's Arguments,” 194, 195.

¹⁸. “A Reasonable Belief?”, 74. He also cites work of his own that goes to show that the distinction between primary and secondary qualities was drawn by philosophers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in a number of different ways. This, if true, does not affect my case; there is no reason why the distinction I have insisted on should not be equivalent to only one aspect or version of the distinction or distinctions that they intended to draw.

scientists really do belong to them, and belong to them prior to and independently of our experience of them and thought about them; and the Berkeleyans who claim that the things of our experience are the only real things, and that the theories of scientists are just practical devices for manipulation and anticipation of experience.¹⁹ Nowadays what Locke would have called the primary qualities of things are apt to be conceived in terms of swarms of wave-particles rather than solid parcels of stuff, and there is a tendency to identify the real with what would be postulated at the ideal term of science, when all relevant observations had been made and all likely theoretical possibilities envisaged. But the essence of the matter remains the same—the real properties of things are to be grasped by means of theories verified or to be verified in experience, but are not themselves direct objects of experience. Berkeley wrongly inferred, from the fact that the postulates of scientific theory could not be perceived, that they could not really exist or occur. But what Locke missed, and Berkeley grasped very firmly in his way, is the intentional relation of primary qualities to the mental operations performed by scientists—that is, that they are nothing more or less than what are in the ideal circumstances to be conceived and affirmed through these mental operations.

As MacIntosh sees it, one reason that the distinction between primary and secondary qualities is objectionable is that it is often difficult or impossible to assign particular attributes unequivocally to one category or the other.²⁰ I agree that this is often impossible to do, since many attributes have both primary and secondary aspects; but I deny that this constitutes an objection to the distinction. Suppose I say, “This leaf is green.” I may mean, “This leaf appears to the human eye in a certain way in a good light”; or I may mean, “This leaf really has a set of properties, independent of whether anyone is observing it or not, that account for its appearing to the human eye in a certain way in a good light”—that is to say, as is now known, that it emits light within a certain range of wavelengths. In the former case, I ascribe a secondary quality to the leaf; in the latter a primary. To say someone is queen of Canada (to take an example of MacIntosh’s) is to imply that people think and speak about her, and behave in relation

¹⁹. For a fine expression of a contemporary Berkeleyan approach, and polemics against the newer versions of Locke’s position, see Bas van Fraassen, *The Scientific Image* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980).

²⁰. MacIntosh, “A Reasonable Belief?”, 79.

to her, in a certain range of ways; to attribute thought, speech, and behaviour to persons is to ascribe primary qualities to them. (Whatever the dreams of scientific reductionists and eliminative materialists, persons really think, and to say that they think is not merely to speak in terms of “primitive folk-psychology.” If it were, the very system of scientific knowledge on which such views are supposedly based, depending as it does on the assumption that we can get to know about the real world by thinking properly, would collapse in ruins.)

It may be wondered whether, on the account advanced here, the intelligibility of the world is something that is to be known a priori or as a matter of experience.²¹ The answer is the perhaps disappointing one that it depends what one means by “a priori” or by “experience.” The actual procedure by which one may come to know it can be sketched as follows: By having experiences, envisaging possibilities that might account for these experiences, and affirming as actually so those possibilities that do appear to account for them, I come to know of a world that I assume to exist prior to and independently of my experiences of it and my hypotheses and judgements about it. I have reason to believe, too, that what applies to me applies also to other human beings, not only to ordinary people in the prosecution of their day-to-day affairs but to the greatest scientists in the course of their professional work. Later I may come to reflect on the fact that I and other persons use our minds in this kind of way in coming to know the world, and on the implications of the fact that we do so. I must at least *unconsciously assume* that knowledge is available to me in this way, in order to use my mental powers effectively at all; this assumption is thus a priori. But it is one thing to *make* assumptions, another thing to *spell out*, and yet a third to *justify*, what one assumes; to do these things, I have to reflect on what may be called (in rather a wide sense) my *experience* of coming to know. For it does not quite seem to do justice to the range of one’s conscious awareness to restrict this to sense experience, or even to sense experience in combination with emotions and feelings; one is also aware, as Locke noted in connection with what he called “reflection,”²² of asking questions with respect to one’s sensations and feelings, proposing answers to these questions, coming to understand or misunderstand,

²¹. Compare the review by John Leslie of my *The Intelligible Universe*, in *Canadian Philosophical Reviews* (1984): 164–65.

²². *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* II.6.

marshalling evidence, making judgements, coming to decisions, and so on. Accounts of how one may come to know by sense experience about a world supposed to exist, and to be largely as it is, prior to and independently of one's sense experience can hardly themselves be given in terms of sense experience; but it does not immediately follow that they cannot be given in terms of any kind of "experience," if this is taken in a wide sense to include awareness of the mental acts that one applies to sense experience.²³

It seems to me that the intelligibility of the world as subject both to common knowledge and to scientific investigation is brought out with extraordinary force by the philosophy of Kant. But Kant's *explanation* for this intelligibility is quite implausible, and indeed incoherent in the last analysis. Kant's view is that the world is not intelligible in itself, prior to and independently of the imposition of the categories of our understanding upon it; but that it *becomes* intelligible *as a result of* such imposition. But to make this claim is to owe some account of what things in themselves might be before the forms of human thought are imposed upon them, unless one is to resort to the subjective idealist, and obviously absurd, conclusion that no such things in themselves exist at all. And it is notorious that to give such an account in terms of Kant's philosophy is impossible.

I have tried so far to establish that the world is intelligible, and the sense in which it may be said to be so. Why should its intelligibility require explanation? Now, I have already argued at some length that it is not one thing to establish a fact and quite another thing to establish the explanation of that fact. Rigorous inquirers are not like the American billionaire who, when pointedly asked about the architecture of the house that he had had built, said that he intended to add the architecture later. To establish the existence of any fact, the occurrence of any state of affairs, is *eo ipso* to put it in an explanatory framework along with other facts. And to put it within such a framework of explanation is to eliminate its mere bruteness; I have already tried to show that there is no need for such frameworks to be

²³. This approach to the problems of epistemology is that followed by Bernard Lonergan's "generalized empirical method" (Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* [London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1957], 72, 243), which I believe to be essentially correct. What Locke calls "reflection" is a remarkable anticipation of this method, though there does not seem to have been any direct influence of Locke on Lonergan.

deterministic, which would eliminate free will,²⁴ or to explain away all coincidences, which would lead to many absurdities. Explanatory frameworks are intelligible, or they are not really explanatory frameworks; for the world to fit into explanatory frameworks, as the success of the sciences appears to show that it does, is thus for it to be an intelligible world. Here we appear to have a very general fact about the world, which, like other facts, would seem to require explanation.

The explanation of the world, or of some fundamental feature of the world, by appeal to something that is *outside* the world or *other than* the world has been thought to give rise to some difficulty. It is very natural, after all, to mean by “the world” the sum-total of what exists. And it makes no sense to postulate an additional existent to account for the sum-total of what exists. To exist, it would have itself to be either that sum-total or some part or aspect of it. From the notion of God as something supposed to account for *everything* that exists, it is easy to derive a sort of ontological argument for the non-existence of God—valid, and therefore sound unless there is something wrong with the premisses.²⁵ God, if supposed to *account for* the sum total of what exists, can be identical neither with that sum-total nor with any part or aspect of it. But in that case, clearly, God, as being *other than* anything that exists, does not exist.²⁶ However, I am not convinced that this negative form of ontological argument is any more immune from criticism than the positive one. I believe that the best way of putting the question of God’s existence, in such a way that neither divine existence nor divine non-existence is covertly assumed, is in something like the following formulation. Is there anything that is related to the *rest* of what exists rather as cause to effect, or as conscious agent to action or product? I concede

²⁴. I mean by free will the real capacity to perform or not to perform certain actions, even when all circumstances are taken into account. This is not the kind of “freedom” that many philosophers, following Hume (*Enquiry* VIII), have commended as being compatible with determinism.

²⁵. This seems to be the nub of what Hume and Professor Antony Flew have called “the Stratonician presumption” of the non-existence of God. See Flew, *God and Philosophy* (London: Hutchinson, 1966).

²⁶. Ivor Leclerc has argued that while God does not strictly speaking exist, God is among the *archai* or principles underlying existence. A similar suggestion was made by Paul Tillich. Since neither Tillich nor Professor Leclerc is an atheist, it seems to me less misleading to express their position by saying that God does exist, but in a different manner from whatever depends for its existence on prior divine existence and activity. Compare Leclerc, *The Nature of Physical Existence* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1972), 336–38.

that, unless there is some positive reason to maintain that such a being exists, one should apply Ockham's razor, and deny that it does. However, I maintain that the intelligibility of the universe, its susceptibility to the kind of inquiry and explanation best exemplified by the sciences, does indeed provide grounds for maintaining that such a being exists.²⁷

But, it may be asked, short after all of the soundness of some kind of ontological argument, does not the scandalous arbitrariness of a "reasonlessly existing person," as John Leslie has expressed it,²⁸ remain to plague the theist? Why should that brute fact be any more acceptable than any other? As Hepburn asks, how real is the explanatory gain in postulating God? If we cannot come up with a coherent account of God as necessary being by some kind of ontological argument, why should the intellectual restlessness that urges us to go beyond the world for an explanation stop short with God?²⁹ Here I think the theist may appeal not to the ontological argument, but to an argument that does part of the same job, in halting the regress of causes or sufficient reasons pointed out by Hume and by so many subsequent philosophers.³⁰ So far as one has a clear and distinct idea of what is involved in the notion of an intelligent will that grounds *all else* that exists, one apprehends that, given that it exists at all, it cannot be grounded by anything *else*. That such a being does exist, however, can only be affirmed reasonably if it is required to account for the world as such (as in many versions of the cosmological argument) or for some particular feature of it (as in arguments from design) or both. The cosmological argument does not at this rate have to be supplemented by the ontological argument, as Kant and Bertrand Russell maintained,³¹ but rather by an argument instructively parallel to it, establishing not God's existence as such, but

²⁷. Stopes-Roe concedes somewhat ironically that it does make some kind of sense to divide up reality in this kind of way, but suggests that it is pointless ("The Intelligibility of the Universe," 67n10). However, not only the intelligibility of the universe, but the fact that so many people have set store, for better or for worse, by the question whether there is or is not a God, shows that it has point. Of course, it is one thing to say that such a division of reality has *point* (say, in cheering people up or encouraging them in virtuous pursuits); it is quite another to show that it is *justified*.

²⁸. *Universes* (London: Routledge, 1989), 165.

²⁹. "Remarks," 74.

³⁰. Hume, *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, Part IV.

³¹. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A607 = B635; Russell, *History of Western Philosophy* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1946), 610–11.

God's aseity, or independence, *if* God is defined as an intelligent will that grounds all else that exists. In a sense this would leave one saddled with a "reasonlessly existing person," but also with one whose very nature implies that there could be no ground outside itself for its existence.

I think that we are now in a position to put forward a version of the principle of sufficient reason that is not subject to the objections mentioned above as having been raised by Terence Penelhum. Every real state of affairs must either be susceptible of explanation, with the qualifications already given, or be such that, given the kind of thing or state of affairs that it is, it could not conceivably be explained. The question of the existence of God might then be set out in this way: Is there some thing or state of affairs (God, the existence of God) that is related to all other things and states of affairs in such a way that, although they are to be explained as ultimately dependent on it, it is such that it could not by its very nature be dependent on anything else?

"But," it is often asked, "why should the world itself not be this self-existing being? Why should one go outside the world in one's search for explanation?" As Stopes-Roe elegantly puts it, "How can God be better placed to terminate the quest [for explanation] than the world was?"³² Hepburn asks why appeal to God should render fully intelligible what was not fully intelligible without such appeal, and how God could mitigate the contingency of the world.³³ The answer to these questions, as will appear from what has already been said, will depend on what one means by "the world." If one means by that term "the sum-total of what exists," then plainly it is fruitless to look outside the world for something else that exists and that explains it; such a being would itself be part of "the world." If one means by it, however, "the sum-total of beings (things and states of affairs) that are dependent on other beings for their existence," then it does seem at least meaningful to ask whether there is a being (or beings) on which all other beings depend but that is not similarly dependent. Let us distinguish as "world *A*" and "world *B*" the two senses of "the world" set out in the last two sentences. Then the question "Is there anything on which world *A* as a whole depends?" is nonsense, since any candidate for the position would itself have to be a part of that world. But "Is there anything on which the rest of world *A* depends?"

³². "The Intelligibility of the Universe," 73.

³³. "Remarks," 73.

or “Is there anything on which world *B* as a whole depends?” appears to make perfectly good sense.

Cosmological arguments notoriously lay stress on the “necessary being” of God as opposed to the “contingent being” of the world. However, as Hepburn points out, to speak of “necessary being” is at first sight at least to speak of something with abstract or formal status rather than of the personal Creator who is the real focus of the religious faith of theists.³⁴ It appears to me that this difficulty can be met by a development of the argument that I have already put forward. What that argument shows, if sound, is that something in the nature of an intelligent will is needed to account for the rest of what exists; one may then go on to show in what sense, if any, such a being is properly to be thought of as a “necessary being.” Very briefly, I should say that the intelligent will on which the (rest of the) world depends must, given that it exists at all, be “necessary” for the existence or operation of anything else that may exist, without any other thing being “necessary” in turn for its existence or operation. I do not see why the intelligent will that is necessary in this sense need be less than the personal or more-than-personal being that, admittedly, is the essential focus for the piety of theists.

It might be granted that appeal to an intelligence grounding the world might render its intelligibility more explicable. But by what right, it might still be asked, is this particular divine attribute privileged? Theists have been wont to ascribe abysses of mystery and incomprehensibility to their God. How is the ad hoc abstracting of just one aspect of the supposed divine nature, that of intelligence, to be justified?³⁵ A similar response may be given to this difficulty as to the one last mentioned. Having shown, if she can, that there is good reason to suppose that the world depends for its existence on something in the nature of an intelligent will, the theist can go on to show why and in what sense this being should or could be regarded as incomprehensible or impenetrably mysterious. And there seems to be no great difficulty about this. Surely we should hardly expect to be able to plumb the depths of the mind that conceives the full range of possible worlds, and wills the one that actually exists. On this matter of the divine mystery and incomprehensibility, I think contemporary theists can draw an important moral from some recent philosophical discussion. When people are inclined excessively to domesticate God,

³⁴. Ibid.

³⁵. Ibid., 73–74.

to reduce the divine to the worldly or human, it is all very well to emphasize the *via negativa*, to stress the divine mysteriousness and the limitation in applicability to God of all properties ascribable to human beings and other constituents of the contingent world. But unless the *via negativa* is qualified and corrected by some kind of *via affirmativa*, the conclusion becomes virtually inevitable that all talk of God is senseless.³⁶ If conception of God by analogy with human intelligence and will is maintained at the heart of the affirmative way, a secure basis is provided for repudiation by theists of the charge that their talk about God is meaningless, which charge modern philosophical atheists have of course often levelled against them.

It may still be insisted that there is a gratuitous multiplication of entities involved in postulating a God whom we cannot experience to explain the world that we do experience.³⁷ But I believe that to put the matter in this way is unduly to prejudice the mind against any case there might be for a rational theism. The fact is that what we experience or can experience, even when this is interpreted in the most generous possible way (where it is granted, say, that we have direct experience of physical objects—including some, like the Pole Star, that are at a very considerable distance from us—rather than merely of sense contents), falls very much short of the world as we conceive it, or even of the world as we can in the most ordinary sense be said to know it. For one thing, the world as we come to *know* it, to form justified true judgements about it, is one characterized by causal links between events; but as Hume established once and for all, such causal links are not direct objects of experience. And the things and events of the past, the thoughts and feelings of other persons, and the particles of nuclear physics are none of them objects of experience; but they are aspects of reality that may come to be known owing to their causal or explanatory connection to experience. That there are such things as neutrinos, that King Henry VIII of England divorced two of his wives and had two more of them beheaded, that my friend has been thinking about indices and surds

³⁶. Compare Hume, *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, Part IV: “How do you Mystics, who maintain the absolute incomprehensibility of the Deity, differ from Sceptics or Atheists, who assert, that the first cause of all is unknown and unintelligible?” Compare Kai Nielsen, *Philosophy and Atheism* (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1985), *passim*.

³⁷. Compare Hepburn, “Remarks,” 72.

during the last half hour (assuming she has been doing so), are facts constitutive of the world, to be known as providing the best explanation for the evidence available in our experience. But they are not themselves actual or even potential objects of experience.

One might, as Stopes-Roe suggests, admit that the world was intelligible and that its intelligibility needed explanation and yet maintain that it had a scientific explanation that made no reference to God.³⁸ Why should not the intelligibility of the world be founded on the fact that human beings, “themselves the products of natural processes, understand it by processes which are entirely natural?”³⁹ It is a fact of human life that we give meanings to words in the course of interacting with the world, and understand the meanings given by others. Does *that* not explain the intelligibility of the world so far as it *needs* explaining?⁴⁰ Moreover, as MacIntosh says, “the ability to infer the unperceived from the perceived is evolutionarily unsurprising.”⁴¹ If we can find out scientifically how animals with epistemic abilities like our own—and for that matter, like those of cows and chimpanzees—evolved, why should there be any further problem?⁴² But such purported explanations for the intelligibility of the world appear to me to put the cart before the horse. I grant that, *given* an intelligible world, beings might be liable to evolve within it that were capable of understanding it. But this is not to explain how it was intelligible in the first place. And there does seem to be some incoherence about the notion of an explanation of the intelligibility of the world that is “scientific” in quite the usual sense. For the applicability of scientific explanation in the usual sense to the world seems to *presuppose* that it is intelligible, and therefore can hardly be said to provide an *explanation* of the fact that it is so. Of course, one might use the term “scientific” in a broader sense to refer to all explanations that are rational, including those that purport to explain how it is that the world is subject to scientific explanation in the usual, rather narrower sense. In this broader sense, appeal to God might well be regarded as scientifically appropriate if it was the most satisfactory

38. “The Intelligibility of the Universe,” 45.

39. *Ibid.*, 69.

40. *Ibid.*, 71.

41. “A Reasonable Belief?”, 81.

42. *Ibid.*, 82.

way of accounting for the existence of some overall feature of the world that could not otherwise be properly accounted for.⁴³

In connection with Stopes-Roe's appeal to "natural" explanations, questions arise about the kinds of explanations that are to be counted as natural, why such explanations are plausible or desirable, and in what circumstances and under what conditions they are so. "Naturalism" in the sense of determination to rule out a priori all explanation in terms of divine agency can be dismissed in this context, where the existence and agency of God are precisely what is in question, as mere prejudice. There is an interesting problem whether explanation in terms of the activity of intelligent agents is itself natural, or whether a really natural explanation of the behaviour of such agents would be one that reduced it without remainder to the terms of physics and chemistry. But such reductive explanations would in the long run be destructive of physics and chemistry themselves, since the theories constitutive of these subjects are to be believed only on the assumption that they have been arrived at by intelligent agents on the ground that they are the best way of accounting for the relevant evidence.⁴⁴ And if explanation in terms of intelligent agency must be accepted as irreducible at the level of human life, on what rational grounds can one eliminate it a priori in attempting to explain the existence of the world or certain general characteristics of it? One may properly, of course, determine as a result of careful inquiry that other forms of explanation are more satisfactory, or that no explanation is needed; but it does seem wrong to prejudge the issue on the ground that naturalistic explanations, or explanations that avoid reference to God, are in all cases to be preferred just as such. Admittedly, it is merely a lazy habit of mind that would explain any and every puzzling feature of the world as due to God as distinct from some intra-mundane and therefore natural agency; as theists used to say, God, except perhaps in very special circumstances, is in the habit of operating through secondary causes. But we have already found reason to doubt whether such ex-

⁴³. MacIntosh will have it that there are occasions when the "best" explanation for some state of affairs ought not to be adopted (*ibid.*, 86). I concede that there are occasions when even the best explanation that has yet been thought of has such solid grounds for objection that one ought to cast around for some other that has not yet occurred to anybody. But I can find no good reason to think this principle applies to the case where something in the nature of an intelligent will is invoked to explain the intelligibility of the world.

⁴⁴. Compare Burns, "Meynell's Arguments," 187.

planations could really be applicable to the fact of the intelligibility of the world, since they presuppose its intelligibility.

It may be worth concluding with a brief note on the bearing of this discussion on the old philosophical rivalry between “realism” and “idealism,” and the hoary problem of the relation between “mind and the world-order.” Of course, as is shown by the development of European philosophy from Locke to Hegel, once one has started ascribing elements of what common sense takes to be the objective world to the constructive powers of mind, it is difficult to know where to stop. I would argue that once naive realism is given up, there *is* no satisfactory stopping place short of what I would call a fully consistent critical realism, and the theism that is its natural corollary. These combine the idealist insight that the world shows evidence of being due to the constructive and constitutive powers of mind with the realist insistence that it is absurd to suppose that it is *human* minds, whether individually or socially, that are responsible for it. It should be pointed out that all that can be known by the kind of general reflection on the nature of knowledge and of the world as knowable that I have sketched is *that* the world is intelligible; which particular *kind* of intelligibility it has by the will of God (in terms of the elements of Aristotle or of Mendeleev, in terms of Cartesian vortices or of general relativity) can only be known as the term of a protracted process of inquiry into experience. One cannot *deduce* this from first principles in the manner of Spinoza or some German idealists.⁴⁵

⁴⁵. I am very grateful to Jack MacIntosh for his criticisms of an earlier draft of this paper, which enabled me to eliminate some infelicities and fill in a number of lacunae.

Hume on Religion: Stopping the Ocean with a Bull-Rush?

Annette C. Baier

Will you set up profane reason against sacred mystery? No punishment is great enough for your impiety. And the same fires, which were kindled for heretics, will serve also for the destruction of philosophers. (*R.* 54; *G.G.* II, 342)¹

Terry Penelhum has done much to help us to understand Hume's philosophy, and in particular his philosophy of religion. He has shown us how Hume's attempts, in his *Dialogues on Natural Religion*, to bring reason to bear on theology relate to Joseph Butler's reasonings in his *Analogy*. I shall look in this essay not at the *Dialogues*, but at the *Natural History Of Religion*,² where Hume purports carefully to avoid the dangerous impiety of turning reason against religion (indeed, he *says* there that religion's foundation in reason is obvious), the impiety that he characterizes as attempting to stop the ocean of religious sentiment with the frail bull-rush of human reason. But he does there use a stronger version of Moses' rod to try to stop the red seas of religious bigotry and bloodshed. What he invokes are those same active forces in human nature that get their more usual

1. R. = David Hume, *The Natural History of Religion*, ed. H. E. Root (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957). G.G. = David Hume, *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. T. H. Green and T. H. Grose (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1907). Other abbreviations used in the text are: M. = David Hume, *Essays*, ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Press, 1985); S.B. = David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge and P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978).

2. Between the time of writing this paper and the publication of this volume, Penelhum spoke to the eighteenth meeting of the Hume Society (Eugene, Oregon, August 1991) on the *Natural History*. Unfortunately, the publication schedule made it impossible for me to comment on Penelhum's views here.

expression in religion itself. His is the “pious” project of showing respect for the awe, anxiety, and wish to propitiate the powerful that, following Epicurus, Hobbes, and Spinoza, he finds to be the human roots of ordinary religious sentiment; respect enough to turn them on to, if not necessarily against, their normal expression in our propensity to recognize “sacred mystery.” H.E. Root, in his introduction to his edition of Hume’s text, writes that “the most obvious, though not for that reason the simplest question one wants to ask about *The Natural History of Religion* is: What was Hume trying to do?” (R. 9). My suggestion is that the *Natural History* is an attempt to see what happens when we direct upon religion the very forces that it expresses—it is another Humean exercise in “reflection” in its narrow sense,³ a “return on the soul” of some psychic force, in this case of the rather complex combination of cognitive, emotional, and motivational drives that Hume finds to be the original principles or sources of religion, where “religion” is taken to mean “veneration of such invisible powers as are believed to be affecting human happiness.” Hume’s own anxious object of concern is the invisible power of religious sentiment itself. His are meta-religious meditations. This *Natural History*, like the natural history of civil society that Hume gave us in his account of the artificial virtues, is an instructive tale of the attempt of a troublesome passion to correct itself by turning on itself. But whereas it is a matter of social history that “the interested affection” has indeed been corrected in civil society, the turn of religious sentiment on itself is something that Hume has to show us how to do—it is a tentative proposal for reform that he offers here, not a story of an already implemented and successful reform.

There are a few fairly obvious cues to encourage such a reading. In the Introduction Hume announces that it is “the origin of religion in human nature” that is his concern. “What those principles are, which give rise to the original belief, and what those accidents and causes are which direct its operation? is the subject of our present

³. I present a reading of the *Treatise* as such an exercise in *A Progress of Sentiments: Reflections on Hume’s Treatise* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991). Others before me have found parallels between Hume’s method in the *Treatise* and that in the *Natural History*, but not, as far as I know, this particular parallel. Keith E. Yandell, In *Hume: “Inexplicable Mystery”* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), chap. 2, finds a parallel between the *Natural History*’s explanation of religious beliefs and the explanation that Hume gives (in *Treatise* I, IV) of our belief in an external world, and in any enduring self.

inquiry" (*R.* 21; *G.G.* II, 310). The "original" belief in some deity is found not to be an instinctive one, not "universal in all nations and ages," as "love of progeny," for example, is taken by Hume to be. "The first religious principles must be secondary" (*ibid.*), that is, must be psychologically secondary. Hume is intent on analyzing the psychological forces that usually, but not quite always, result in "the original belief" in some god. The principles in question are not inflexible—their working is variable and they might, therefore, be diverted, turned on to their own more usual workings: they might become reflexive. That they are indeed being made to work at this meta-level in the *Natural History* is indicated in, for example, its twelfth section, "With Regard to Doubt or Conviction." One might have expected the topic here to be religious doubt and religious conviction, but in fact it is doubt about *the sincerity of others' professed religious beliefs*, as well as dogmatic certainty about one's own, which Hume here takes as his topic: "We meet every day with people so sceptical with regard to history that they assert it impossible for any nation ever to believe such absurd principles as were those of Greek and Egyptian paganism: and at the same time so dogmatical with regard to religion, that they think the same absurdities to be found in no other communion" (*R.* 55; *G.G.* II, 342). Although in other contexts Hume is willing enough to levy the charge of hypocrisy against religious believers, and had in a note to his essay "Of National Characters" found "a continual grimace and hypocrisy" to be the occupational disease of clerics (*G.G.* I, 245–47; *M.* 199–200), here his preferred combination of doubt and conviction is tolerant acceptance of the sincerity of others' (especially of polytheists') profession of faith (or at least willingness to give them the benefit of any doubt), along with some real doubt as to what to profess oneself. Only at the meta-level, the level he is noting that we do readily take with respect to *other people's* religious beliefs, is any reasonable assurance about the correctness of one's own beliefs to be found. It is harder to be observant and reflective about one's own religious convictions and doubts than about those of others. "Thus all mankind stand staring at each other," each amazed at the other's strange faith. But when each includes her own faith in the object of her gaze, the amazement may become less divisive, and agreement more likely. That, I think, is Hume's hope for the sort of meta-religious sentiment that he is showing us how to cultivate. His version of it includes fear of the effects of more ordinary religious sentiments, and perhaps also of the reception to be expected for his "true religion."

His thirteenth section, on impiety, takes that to lie in “daemonism,” in attributions of “perverse wickedness” to the god to which its “terrified devotees” bow down. Impiety in a religion is worship of immoral forces, which of course has bad effects on the morality of such worshippers, effects that Hume dwells on in the fourteenth section. He approvingly quotes Plutarch’s account of the retort of one who heard Timotheus recite a hymn of extravagant praise to Diana, “that cruel capricious goddess.” The response elicited was: “May your daughter become such as the deity whom you celebrate” (*R.* 67; *G.G.* II, 354). The test for a pious conception of a god is whether or not the moral traits attributed to that god would be welcomed if found in one’s own daughters. This is a nice control on the tendency to imagine fearful, more-than-humanly powerful *father* figures. Whatever one fears, what one admires and praises should be what one really would welcome in one’s children, including one’s female children. The gentle suggestion is also that gods are our minds’ progeny, and so, if we purport to adore them, they should be formed or reformed to exhibit what we sincerely take to be admirable, as well as powerful. “But as men farther exalt their idea of their divinity; it is their notion of his power and knowledge only, not of his goodness, which is improved” (*R.* 67, *G.G.* II, 354). This often yields the impiety of mouthing insincere praises, of faking “ravishment, ecstasy.” It can take the form of self-deceit, either where the “secret opinion” gives the lie to the spoken words, or where even that secret opinion “itself contracts a kind of falsehood,” and is untrue to “inward sentiment” (*ibid.*). The pious person, then, is the one whose words, beliefs, and inward sentiments are not false to each other, the person of virtue and honesty who will praise no power that lacks virtue and honesty. Piety has been transfigured by Hume from deference to the faith of our fathers to sincerity and wholeness of mind and heart and an unwillingness to praise in a powerful being any quality that one would discourage in one’s own daughter. The expected virtues of the not-yet-very-powerful, and the divine attributes, are to serve as mutual checks.

Piety at the meta-level will carry this coherence of evaluation to a higher level. One will not, as a meta-religious moralist, be proud of that dogmatism and intolerance of disagreeing viewpoints which one would condemn in the less reflective religionist. So even if some assurance can be reached about the human roots of the varieties of religion, it had better be assurance only about “probabilities and appearances.” Like the learned philosophical Varro, the true meta-religionist will avoid dogmatism, will listen to objections, will be willing

to reconsider and, where warranted, to revise her opinions and admit uncertainties. And one will have to avoid the “daemonism” of propitiating perversely wicked religious powers with false flattery or insincere shows of respect.

One test of any reading of Hume’s *Natural History* is the power it gives us to trace some order in its author’s moves in the concluding “General Corollary,” with its somewhat enigmatic succession of paragraphs. If it really is a corollary, then it should draw out some sort of implications of what had preceded it. My hypothesis is that Hume in the main body of the work has been encouraging us to move to the meta-level. We are encouraged to follow him and address, not the question Which religious beliefs are reasonable or true?, but rather, What is it reasonable to believe about the causes of these religious beliefs?; not What caused the universe? but What causes human beliefs in a universe-cause?; not What invisible powers influence our happiness and misery? but What invisible powers influence our sentiments about the powerful influences on our happiness and misery? It is not fear of death and of incompletely known super-human powers that is expressed, but fear of the power of religious fears; not hope of an other-worldly afterlife, but hope that our hopes can be redirected on to an end to religious intolerance and religious wars. The concluding section might have been expected to sum up Hume’s own meta-religious causal conclusions, and any implied hopes and fears, but then, of course, “corollary” would have been a mislabel. And in fact, it does more than summarize what preceded it. The first paragraph may at first sight seem merely to repeat the *Natural History*’s introduction, but it introduces a new note when the “contrarities” as well as the uniformities of nature are brought in as evidence of a consistent plan, “however inexplicable and incomprehensible.” To claim to have discovered an incomprehensible plan in nature is surely to indulge that “appetite for contradiction” which Hume had earlier attributed to scholastic theologians in the Christian tradition, and we reasonably suspect that irony, parody, or some sort of playfulness is the purpose of the author of this work, at least at this point. I shall eventually propose that what the corollary does is to enact for us, at the meta-level, a certain amount of the very “flux and reflux” of the different religious positions that had earlier been described, as well as to attempt eventually to arrive at a balanced steady state of resignation to the mixed blessings and curses of our human capacities for religion and for reflection on religion. It enacts the “corruption of theism” and the refinements of polytheism that had been found to characterize religious history, and

does this at the meta-level—at the level of reaction to polytheism and theism, rather than at the level of expression of polytheism, theism, or corrupt theism. The meta-religious corollary takes the form of a mystery play, in which the main story of the preceding text of the *Natural History* is dramatized before the deeper moral is drawn. Meta-theism and meta-polytheism, pious and impious meta-religious conceptions, hope and fear, courage and abasement are acted out in the first two paragraphs, before a sort of ironic reconciliation is attempted in the third and subsequent balanced paragraphs, leading up to the final enigmatic (meta-enigmatic?) paragraph. The “consistent plan” of the “General Corollary” seems to include some intent to make comprehension and explication not boringly easy. Some contrarities discover themselves in it, and both its final enigma and the philosophical escape made from it are challenges to the interpreter looking for a consistent plan on Hume’s part. The best way to comprehend our author’s plan, I propose, is to suppose that switches of view themselves reflect the typical changes in religious sentiment that were described in the foregoing sections. Their flux is intended as reflective recognition and higher-level re-enactment of the flux of more ordinary religious sentiments, and the final admission of bafflement is intended as reflective repetition of the acknowledged ignorance-despite-attempts-to-know that is an essential ingredient in the complex cause of religion, as Hume understands this cause. But before one can test this suggestion, one must first look at the causes, variety, and typical directions of change that Hume in the main body of the *Natural History* found to characterize ordinary religious sentiment.

The roots of all religion, polytheistic or monotheistic, are claimed to be “the anxious concern for happiness, the dread of future misery, the terror of death,” combining with our thwarted curiosity about remote causes and our willingness to postulate and often to anthropomorphise invisible causal powers whenever no ordinary visible causes are discoverable.

We are placed in this world as in a great theatre, where the true springs and causes of every event are entirely concealed from us; nor have we sufficient wisdom to foresee, or power to prevent those ills with which we are continually threatened . . . these *unknown causes*, then, become the constant object of our hope and our fear; and while the passions are kept in perpetual alarm by an anxious expectation of the events, the imagination is equally employed in forming ideas of those powers on which we have so entire a dependence. (*R.* 28–29; *G.G.* II, 316)

The ideas we tend to form are of powers like those visible powers—fathers, kings, tyrants—who control some aspects of our happiness and misery, so it is natural that we imagine the unknown superior powers as having “thought, reason, and passion” and as able to be influenced by our prayers and sacrifices. “We find human faces in the moon, armies in the clouds, and by a natural propensity, if not corrected by experience and reflection: ascribe malice or good will to every thing that hurts or pleases us” (*R.* 29; *G.G.* II, 317). Such postulated quasi-human powers are not, Hume thinks, at first seen as our creators, but primarily as the current and future determiners of our fate. Just as the child who tries to placate a powerful father may at first have no idea of the father’s role in that child’s origins, so there can be, and apparently was, anxious devotion to powerful invisible spirits without any attribution of world-forming (as distinct from happiness-influencing) powers to them. “Hesiod . . . supposes gods and men to have sprung equally from unknown powers of nature” (*R.* 35; *G.G.* II, 322). It is the special genius of the monotheist not simply to fuse the various invisible powers of the polytheist into one power on whom we are believed now to depend, but to utilize the postulated mind of that power also as designer and creator of us and our world. As postulated world cause, a designing mind might be arrived at by attention to largely non-human phenomena, rather than from anxious hopes and fears for our own happiness. Contemplation of the works of nature, attention to the regularities and uniformities to be found there, can lead to the idea of “one Supreme Deity, the author of nature,” an idea that need not be linked in any direct way with that of the powers that the less detached “barbarous necessitous animal” postulates in order to explain something frightening and unusual, say, a monstrous birth. “It alarms him from its novelty; and immediately sets him a trembling, and sacrificing, and praying” (*R.* 25; *G.G.* II, 312).

Hume spends some time separating what we would call the deistic hypothesis of an intelligent or intelligence-analogous power behind nature from the fusion of this idea with that of a “provident” power, one still likely to intervene and re-form its creation, one who might be “flexible by gifts and entreaties, by prayers and sacrifices” (*R.* 47; *G.G.* II, 335). Intolerant monotheism makes this fusion. Its demand for “unity of faith and ceremonies” is motivated by the zeal to please and influence the one all-powerful God. Speculative monotheists or deists, by contrast, “have denied a *particular* Providence, and have asserted that the Sovereign Mind, or first principle of all things, having fixed general laws by which nature is

governed, gives free and uninterrupted course to these laws, and disturbs not, at every turn, the settled order of events by particular volitions” (*R.* 42, *G.G.* II, 329). This non-providential, calm theism gets sympathetic treatment from Hume, and it may be that the “genuine theism” of the final section includes a variant of it. It, however, will not strictly count as “religion,” if that term is kept for sentiments towards and actions intended to please a power that is interested in our sentiments and actions, a powerful will that is “flexible by gifts and entreaties.” Once the *anxious* concern for human happiness is taken away from monotheism, it becomes a calm passion, an appreciation of the order and beauty of nature (including human nature) and of whatever power produces that order. Such a calm, Spinozistic love of the nature that we are part of is very different from that anxious fear of unknown influences on one’s happiness and misery to which Hume traces religion in its usual form. “Agitated by hopes and fears . . . men scrutinize, with a trembling curiosity, the course of future causes, and examine the various and contrary events of human life. And in this disordered scene, with eyes still more disordered and astonished, they see the first obscure traces of divinity” (*R.* 28; *G.G.* II, 316). Can the calm love of natural beauty and order grow out of this agitated disordered vision of what appears to be capricious disorder? Can it be in any sense the same divinity that is discerned both by the speculative, calm deist-cum-theist and by the anxious, zealous, intolerant theist?

Criteria of identity for gods are, if anything, harder to state than those for human and other non-divine beings. But if sameness of god is tied to rough sameness of response in those who recognize that god (response in the form of creed or lack of a creed, ceremony or lack of ceremony, convictions about religious duties or liberties, etc.), then a change from bigoted, zealous monotheism to relaxed, tolerant, speculative theism will count as loss of one faith and conversion to a new faith. It will be as great a change as that from Christianity to Judaism, or from either of these to Islam. In Section IV of the *Natural History* Hume raises the difficult question of how we should measure the degrees of proximity of different faiths. Who is more rightly called the atheist, he asks: the one who, having once believed both in a supreme author of nature and in numerous inferior powers (angels, fairies, goblins, sprites), comes to believe only in the latter non-supreme beings; or the one who believes in an orderly nature but in no “invisible intelligent power”? He declares that the latter person is much closer to the “genuine theist” than is the “superstitious” believer in many capricious invisible powers. Who is this denier of all

invisible intelligent power whom Hume is defending from the opprobrious epithet “atheist,” an epithet that he is willing to apply to the believer in devils, elves, and fairies? Is it Hume himself? Does this defended “theist” believe in *visible* supreme and intelligent power? Or in invisible but not exactly “intelligent” supreme power? (Why, in any case, should visibility be so crucial, one might well wonder. And is the power, say, of a thunderstorm visible or invisible?) Room is being made here for a very attenuated form of theism, by what looks like a rather arbitrary ruling on the meaning of the term “atheist,” which has to be taken as “not a *monotheist*,” so that all disbelievers in any version of *one supreme* power become “atheists.” This verbal stipulation may appear to sit uneasily with Hume’s willingness to talk of “*polytheists*,” but it should be noticed that he contrasts them with “theists,” avoiding the word “monotheist,” as if all theists are monotheists. (More gods, it seems, are less, indeed amount to none.) “The gods of all polytheists are no better than the elves and fairies of our ancestors. . . . These pretended religionists are really a kind of superstitious atheists” (*R.* 33; *G.G.* II, 320). One is tempted to turn on Hume his own complaint: “It is a fallacy . . . to rank such opposite opinions under the same denomination.” Or is he here merely pretending to the monotheists’ intolerance of any religion other than their own? At any rate, the “one deity” of the zealous monotheist and the one deity of the calm universe-contemplator can only dubiously be ranked under the same denomination, if sameness of human response is any reliable indicator of sameness of invisible power.

Monotheists discern unity in the powers behind the orderly variety of the visible universe. The reflective monotheist will discern some unity in all forms of monotheism, and indeed in all forms of religion, and will recognize religion not only as a now-powerful force, but also as one that contributed to the forming of the minds of its critics as well as its devotees. The unity that Hume seems to have discerned in all religions, at least until he demotes polytheism to mere “pretended religion,” is the belief in unseen, incompletely understood intelligent or quasi-intelligent powers taken to be determining human fates. The unity in all monotheisms is the belief in *one* power, be it visible or not, intelligent or not, whether still at work in shaping our fates or having finished its work, flexible or inflexible to our entreaties and sacrifices. Monotheistic organized religions typically do encourage prayer and sacrifice, do believe in a providential power, do attribute intelligence and will to that power. Hume as meta-monotheist sees the unity of all the manifestations of religious worship in the oneness of their source in the human psyche,

in a distinctive mixed emotional response to the awareness of our dependence on incompletely known powers, ones that we tend to analogize to human powers. The monotheist sees these powers as essentially one power, and Hume the meta-monotheist sees one and the same human nature at the root of all manifestations of religion.

But Hume also has his meta-polytheist side. He has a proper awareness of the *variety* of human religions, of the differences between the polytheist and the monotheist, even between the polytheist whose chief god takes the visible form of a cat and the one for whom it is a dog, a crocodile, a spotted bull, a dove, or a human person. If “genuine theism” is a form of monotheism, then it becomes uncertain that those who believe in three divine persons in one godhead really count as monotheists—a trinitarian godhead verges on being a pantheon, especially once various “angels and subordinate ministers” are believed to be added to the celestial company. The father–son relationship within the Christian godhead is not so different from the family ties among the Egyptian or the Greek gods. Jupiter may have been the reigning god of the Greek pantheon, but “every temple, every street was full of the ancestors, uncles, brothers, and sisters of this Jupiter, who was in reality nothing but an upstart parricide and usurper” (*R.* 44; *G.G.* II, 332), and Hume likens the Christian extended holy family to such pagan families of gods. “The Virgin Mary, ere checked by the reformation, had proceeded, from being merely a good woman, to usurp many of the attributes of the Almighty: God and St Nicholas go hand in hand in all the prayers and petitions of the Muscovites” (*R.* 44; *G.G.* II, 331). This uncertain status of the Christian religion, neither pure monotheism nor avowed polytheism, may seem to leave Hume’s implied attitude to it also in some doubt. But surely in no very great doubt. His distinctly non-respectful references to those who make and then eat their god, along with his references to the fires kindled for heretics, suggest that he sees the religion of the Christian “God and his angels” to have brought the worst both of polytheism and of monotheism—the absurdities and multiplication of divine beings of the polytheists along with the sacred zeal and rancour of the more “genuine theists,” the purer monotheists. “Popery” is seen to combine superstition with bigotry. (“The place of Hercules, Theseus, Hector, Romulus, is now supplied by Dominic, Francis, Anthony and Benedict” [*R.* 52; *G.G.* II, 339]). The Reformation is credited with curbing the polytheistic proclivities of popery, but apart from that, Protestantism is explicitly mentioned only in an aside, as a case of a splinter group from Christian orthodoxy: “Arian, Pelagian, Erastian, Socinian, Sabellian, Eutychian,

Nestorian, Monothelite, etc., not to mention Protestant" (*R.* 54; *G.G.* II, 342). Monotheism, which is "reasonable and philosophical in its beginnings," becomes steadily more "absurd" as sects define their differences from one another, and develop an "appetite for absurdity and contradiction," testing their faith by their willingness to subdue "their rebellious reason by the belief of the most unintelligible sophisms" (*ibid.*). There is little trace here of any willingness to propitiate the still-powerful religious powers that Hume is describing.

I have suggested that Hume in his meta-religious sentiments adopts the guise both of the unifying monotheist and of the distinguishing polytheist. The powers that result in human religions are those of one common human nature, responsive with fear, adoration, or calm contemplative interest to the more powerful formative and reformatory nature of which it is a part, and of which we can get only partial knowledge. But the variations in the emotional form that this response takes are important. The difference between the "whippings and fastings, cowardice and humility, abject submission and slavish obedience" of some Christians, and the cheerful ease of the polytheists' addresses to their gods (polytheists who "may even, without profaneness aspire sometimes to a rivalry and emulation of them") are of *moral* importance. What interests Hume are not so much the theological variations in themselves as their usual moral "attendants," the differences in toleration or intolerance, good cheer or gloom, "courage or abasement," claims to certainty or admission of uncertainty and ignorance. It is religion as a social phenomenon that is of paramount concern in the *Natural History*. This does not altogether exclude interest in the role of reason in its genesis, if, as I have claimed elsewhere,⁴ Hume's ultimately preferred version of human reason is as a social and language-influenced variant of "reason in animals," what we might call "reason in social and talkative mammals." It is the "popular stories" of gods and demigods, passed on in oral and written traditions, that preserve and also tend to vary religious traditions. Reason in theory is the same in all, and should itself preserve the "true theism" that it supposedly generates. "If these opinions be founded on arguments so clear and obvious as to carry conviction with the generality of mankind, the same

⁴. *A Progress of Sentiments*, chap. 12; and "Hume, the Reflective Women's Epistemologist?", in *Feminist Essays on Reason and Objectivity*, ed. Louise Antony and Charlotte Witt (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993), 35–48.

arguments, which at first diffused the opinions, will still preserve them in their original purity” (*R.* 25–26; *G.G.* II, 212). We find, however, that they are not thus preserved—sects always spring up, variations are introduced, and even after intellectually superior monotheism has arisen out of rational reflection on and correction of the stories of the polytheists, tradition will then “corrupt” this theism into the plethora of sects and rival religions that inhabit the modern world. Reason is almost never found “pure.” With its essential language-dependence comes its admixture with the stories that are told in a particular language, and also the influence of the authority structure of that language community, of its ceremonies of deference, its acknowledged liberties or denial of liberties of speech and thought.⁵ So differences multiply, even in what passes as the universal voice of reason. Hume the meta-polytheist attends to the varieties of “reasoned” conclusion concerning invisible intelligent power, as well as to varying forms of fear and adoration of such power or powers.

In the *Natural History*, Hume’s avowed chief business with religion as such, as much as with “the gross polytheism of the vulgar,” is to “trace all its various appearances, in the principles of human nature whence they are derived” (*R.* 38; *G.G.* II, 325). This project combines monism and pluralism as thoroughly as belief in three persons in one god (along with “his angels”) combines monotheism with a concession to polytheism (or, if one prefers, polytheism with a concession to monotheism). Hume’s reflection on religion is as hybrid as the variant of religion most familiar to him. But any proper enquiry by a scientist of human nature into human religions would of necessity combine this proper recognition of the variety of the human phenomena with a commitment to a search for unifying principles. Hume is looking for explanatory principles, and ones that explain historically, by tracing origins in nature (in this case, in human nature). He is doing natural history. Human nature as he understands it is itself a mix of forces, of reason, inventive fancy, wonder, anxiety, and various emotional needs, and has produced and in turn been influenced by a variety of cultures. To call it one force one must have a fairly lax standard of unity. If the forces that together comprise human nature can come into conflict with one another, then they are many, not one, and equally any unification of different religions as all offspring of

⁵. See my “Hume, the Reflective Women’s Epistemologist,” for further discussion of this topic.

one and the same human nature would be at best only a loose union. Hume famously argued, in the *Treatise*, that human reason and human passion are never conflicting forces in us, since “reason alone” has no moving force or power at all. “Passion,” which *is* a mover, always incorporates some belief or other, so has the service of such reason or intelligence as is available. But human passions are many; they come in different strengths and combinations, and notoriously they can conflict. Hope and fear may compete for dominance in the soul, anxiety can conquer serenity, calm passions can try to pacify violent ones. The human soul, as Hume sees it, is a field of many forces of passion, so that in tracing religion to a mix of human emotional needs, he has effected only about as good a unification as the Christians achieve among their various divine personages. There is indeed a sort of “fit” between Hume’s reflections on religion and the religion that he had strongest reason to reflect upon, that “corruption of theism,” popular Christianity.

One of the theses he puts forward about polytheism is that some of the gods that are believed in by the typical polytheist (and perhaps by the Christian) are human heroes who have undergone apotheosis into demigods or gods. “When men are affected with strong sentiments of veneration for any hero or public benefactor, nothing can be more natural than to convert him into a god, and fill the heavens, after this manner, with continual recruits from humankind” (*R.* 39; *G.G.* II, 327). This promotion of familiar human persons whose power has been found beneficial into slightly less familiar deities, so that it can be hoped that their benefactions will continue, is a different origin from postulating a god as the invisible causal force responsible for some otherwise unexplained phenomena affecting our welfare. In general, Hume is following Hobbes in taking all religion to be a matter of fear-cum-adoration of “power invisible, feigned by the mind,”⁶ where the invisibility is taken to bring incomprehensibility, or at least to entail partial mystery. But if this ignorance-filling and fear-expressing function of religion typically takes the form of belief in beings a bit like ourselves, at least in that they are thought to be “pleased with praise and flattery,” then it can fairly easily be combined with the tendency to glorify and mystify once-familiar human powers, to promote them after their death into immortal gods. The principles or originating causes that lead to hero worship are, Hume says, “the same” as those that explain why “our anxious

⁶. *Leviathan* (London, 1651), chap. 6.

concern endeavours to attain a determinate idea” of the little-understood causes of our happiness and misery “and finds no better expedient than to represent them as intelligent voluntary agents, like ourselves, only somewhat superior in power and wisdom” (*R.* 40; *G.G.* II, 328). A loose criterion of sameness is certainly at work here, but economy of hypotheses would favour equating the mysterious super-human powers determining our current fate with those once-familiar heroes who have undergone apotheosis. (In Hume’s own meta-religious sentiments there may be a touch of quiet hero worship for the great humanist heroes, Epicurus, Lucretius, and Spinoza. Their benefactions to humankind, however, have been less striking, since they have made little impact on popular religious sentiments. The immortality of the heroes of Hume’s reflective and ironic brand of “true religion” is ensured only by their steadily read writings, not by any less refined apotheosis.)

Hume’s attitude to the varieties of religion, in the main body of the *Natural History*, can plausibly enough be seen to employ the very elements that he finds to be the originating sources of religion—he shows some fear of the zeal and rancour of the worshippers of the one true jealous God, he shows some modest hopes that “calmer” religious sentiments might come to prevail, even if the cost of the spread of calm to popular religious sentiments may have to be willingness to tolerate some of the more ridiculous elements of polytheism. He shows as great a curiosity about the causes of religion as the keenest speculative theologian shows about the cause of order and disorder in the universe, and shares the religious believer’s concern with the happiness and misery of mankind, though he does not show much willingness to propitiate the powerful force that he recognizes popular religion to be. Hume is looking for the causes of order and disorder in the religion-prone human mind. Like Herodotus, he wants to be able to distinguish reasonable religious sentiments from the “real madness or disorder of the brain” of those like Cambyses who attack what they take to be false gods (such as spotted bulls), or like the Crusaders and other “deluded votaries” who “openly triumph in those parts of their religion which their adversaries regard as most reproachful” (*R.* 58; *G.G.* II, 346). But Hume’s hopes for a non-disordered vision of religion, for the prevalence of calm, truly sceptical,⁷ religious sentiments over violent bigotry and zeal, are very modest.

⁷. For what I take him to mean by true scepticism see *A Progress of Sentiments*, chaps. 1 and 3.

He expects a “flux and reflux” of intolerant, zealous monotheism alternating with tolerant, relaxed polytheism, with only a fairly remote chance that many will manage to combine the calm sceptical tolerance of the one with the intellectual rigour of which the other is capable (before the “appetite for contradiction and absurdity” gets the better of it). More frequent, alas, will be mixtures of the intolerance of monotheism with the absurd fanciful feignings of the polytheists. So the auguries are not very propitious, as far as religious calm is concerned. Are the prospects any better for meta-religious calm?

This question returns us to the general corollary of the *Natural History*. If Hume is raising religious sentiment to a higher level, by turning it on itself, then this fairly obviously playful coda might well be intended to re-enact for us some of the positions and transitions that have been described in the work it concludes, just as many religious ceremonies symbolically re-enact the dramas crucial to the believer’s claims about how God has acted in human history, while at the same time imbuing them with a “higher,” more refined sense, and drawing some practical moral. Hume’s mystery play begins not with what he believes to have been historically original, “barbarous and uninstructed” polytheism, but with speculative monotheism, belief in a single world “author.” But as previously noted, there is a sly twist to the sort of design that this author is seen to present in “this visible system.” Uniform maxims, prevailing throughout nature, argue for a rule-observing intelligent cause, but in addition, “the contrarieties of nature, by discovering themselves everywhere, become proofs of some consistent plan and establish one single purpose or intention, however inexplicable and incomprehensible.” In a few lines we seem to have here, enacted for us, the corruption of theism by its own appetite for contradiction. Or is it a move to a higher level that the theist is making here? As long as the contrarieties really are “everywhere,” then they might be seen to yield a higher-level uniformity—the world’s author apparently wants to prevent us from finding any uniform maxims except the paradoxical one that, whatever generalization we try (including this one?), it will meet with a counter-instance. (This might also be a hint about the intentions of Hume as author of this work. It is authors of literary works who can indeed provide us with proofs of their incomprehensible intentions.)

The second paragraph takes us from calm speculative curiosity about the cause or causes of the universe (the true theist’s route to religious faith) to a more narrow concern about human happiness—that concern which, when anxious, typically breeds superstition. This concern is here soothed or quietened by the resigned assurance that

“all advantages are attended with disadvantages.” If our hopes are not to court painful disappointment, we should not hope for pure joy, but at best for a mixture of “good and ill, happiness and misery, wisdom and folly, virtue and vice” in which there is more good than ill, more virtue than vice. Is this a polytheist’s comment on the goods and ills of monotheism, as illustrated in the previous paragraph? Was it not merely paradox but folly to purport to find a “consistent plan” in the contrarities, as much as in the uniformities, of nature? Is it theism, already found to be corruptible, that is not likely to remain “pure and entirely of a piece”? The claim made seems to be of greater scope. “A universal compensation prevails in all conditions of being and of existence.” It is the hand of Jupiter that is said to administer this compensation, so I think that we can take Hume here to be speaking out of the polytheistic side of his mouth. The first paragraph ironically presents a monotheist’s version of monotheism, balanced in the second paragraph by the polytheist’s comment that, whatever variant of religion we find ourselves with, from the viewpoint of “the party of humankind against vice and misery” it will be seen to have some advantages and also some disadvantages. It is a fairly refined humanist pluralist, and one very willing to generalize about the plurality, who speaks in this paragraph. Among its implications are that reflection on religion (like religion itself, and everything else) will probably bring a mixture of good and evil, both for the one doing the reflecting and for the rest of humankind.

The third paragraph offers another, more ambitious, generalization about the supposedly universal mixture of evil with good—that the more exquisite the good, the sharper the accompanying evil, or danger. “Few exceptions are found to this uniform law of nature.” (The poet’s fiction of the previous paragraph has, by dropping the reference to Jupiter, become a “law of nature.”) We cannot count on our lives or our brand of religion or our natural histories of religion being the exceptions to this supposed law, and so, if we have any control over our own aspirations, and our religious faith, and what we write and publish, we would do well to opt for “mediocrity and a kind of insensibility in everything.” Applied to religious sentiments, this would lead to endorsement of the more temperate, less zealous, indeed of the “insensible” variants. This would square well with the “plain philosophical assent” to the the existence of a god that J.C.A. Gaskin finds Hume to endorse, an assent that “carries no duties, invites no

action, allows no inferences, and involves no devotion.”⁸ Ought our *meta*-religious sentiments also to be so calm as to be barely recognizable as any sort of passion? Ought we to try to avoid becoming upset at religious intolerance? Ought we to refrain from any splenetic ridicule (such as that which Hume lets himself indulge in, for example, in Section VII) of the more fanciful aspects of religious doctrine and practice? Hume himself is not succeeding in playing it so *very* temperate and safe in his meta-religious sentiments. He certainly makes us sensible of them, and they do seem to invite sane action, some sort of campaign, even if a purely literary campaign, to counter the influence of popular religions and to promote the “true,” more “insensible” religion.

The following paragraphs apply the “law of nature” to theism, first in general and then to particular aspects of it. Theism’s “ravishing” sublimities will be balanced by its “fictions and chimeras” in their base, mean, and terrifying guises. The law of nature concerning the mixing of goods with evils, when applied to theism, is called “the analogy of nature,” and the term “fiction,” which served to introduce the substance of the law, is now applied to the monotheist’s absurder dogmas. “Fictions” for Hume are creations of the human imagination, often embroideries or elaborated interpretations of known facts. They are not necessarily counter to known facts: they simply go beyond what has been verified.⁹ So, some claim could at one time have the status of a fiction, later of a verified law. As long as the mixing of goods with evils is attributed to a particular god, the claim will remain for Hume a fiction, but the mixing itself can be fact, and even law. The law concerns what nature allocates. When extended to cover what human inventions and institutions such as organized religions bring, it will be analogy only. (Hume, however, had in the *Treatise* recognised the continuity between analogy and verified causal law. Analogy is for him a species of “probability of cause” [S.B. 142].) To draw an analogy from what holds good in nature to what holds for human artifices is a nice adaptation of the analogy that Joseph Butler developed in *The Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed, to the Constitution and Course of Nature*. It would be too strong a claim to say that it is a law that every human invention brings evils along with whatever goods it is designed to bring, but there is a good

⁸. Gaskin, *Hume’s Philosophy of Religion* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1988), 222.

⁹. I discuss this in *A Progress of Sentiments*, 103–4.

experience-based probability that this is the case. Hume had once hoped for a version of human morality, and of justice, whose costs in human misery would be vanishingly small, and his hopes for the true religion are geared to fit those he has for an enlightened morality. But some fears that there will be an unattractive reverse side to even the best medals are also felt, and they are expressed with increasing intensity as Hume grew older and more disillusioned with human nature in the forms in which he encountered it. That human institutions or reforms might provide exceptions to the general mixing of good with evil seemed to him less and less probable, as he studied the evidence of history and lived through eighteenth-century history. His increasing pessimism brought doubts not merely about the chances of acceptance of a purely secular morality, but maybe also about the suitability of such a morality to creatures with the weaknesses we have. So his faith in the true religion, as well as his hopes for it, had to be temperate and moderate.

What plan does Hume carry out in the fifth through twelfth paragraphs? Is he emulating Jupiter, handing out goodies with his right hand and insults with his left? The fifth and sixth each balance a flattering claim about theism with a compensatory denunciation. The latter term is not too strong for such famous phrases as “sick men’s dreams.” But the denunciations of theistic religions give way to more general charges against human nature, so that we are left wondering if we can hope for any except sick men. (Women, whom Hume had at the end of the third section characterized as “the timorous and pious sex,” seem to be seen as even more likely to be incurably sick.) The charge of hypocrisy, levelled against the self-proclaimedly pious in the seventh paragraph, is extended in the eighth to the impious. “The most open impiety is attended with a secret dread and compunction.” What sort of piety and impiety are intended here? That conventional piety that Hume himself was seen by his contemporaries signally to lack, or that which he had discussed in the thirteenth and fourteenth sections, where piety was the attainment of virtue and honesty, including honesty in avowals of what one admires? This sort of piety, the piety of the adherent of Hume’s “true religion,” seems by definition to exclude hypocrisy, and the one who is openly impious, in this sense, will be openly a vicious daemonist, an unashamed hypocrite in what he purports to admire. Does Hume attribute a secret dread to such a one? These two paragraphs about the hypocrisy of both the pious believer and the openly impious scoffer make better sense of conventional piety and impiety than of the enlightened piety and the impiety of daemonism that Hume had tried to get us to accept in the

main body of the *Natural History*. Is Hume here admitting to a secret dread and compunction accompanying his own conventional impiety? Were his famous deathbed assurances to Boswell insincere? To avoid this unwelcome inference, we could take the piety and impiety at issue here as higher or meta-versions of ordinary piety, in line with my suggestion that Hume is diverting religious attitudes from their usual non-human objects onto themselves and then commenting on such reflections. Meta-piety of this sort will become proper respect for the only partially understood forces that drive people to ordinary piety, meta-impety a disregard or dismissal of such forces. But there will be a very thin line between this due respect and the daemonism of showing veneration for such powers. Hume in some of his more impertinent and offensive remarks about the Christian faith (for example, the story in the twelfth section of the too-logical convert, Mustapha-turned-Benedict¹⁰) seems to be none too respectful of the power of the church against mockers, and it would not be unreasonable of him to feel some secret dread of the response of powerful churchmen.¹¹ But inasfar as he expresses serious concern about the dangerous force of religious conviction as it is normally found, and so shows due meta-piety, is he open to the charge that an examination of his life would lead one to think that his verbal protestations of this concern were insincere? His willingness to employ ridicule, if a little imprudent, may be calculated strategy against an opponent whose power was not underestimated. Hume does not seem guilty of failing to live in accordance with his professed meta-religious beliefs. Those beliefs, in any case, are not presented by him as certainties, but only as reasonably well supported hypotheses, so he escapes generalizations made about zealots certain of the truth of their beliefs.

¹⁰. This convert is reported, on the day following his first communion, to have replied to his religious instructor's question "How many gods are there?": "None at all. You have told me all along that there is but one God, and yesterday I ate him" (*R.* 56, *G.G.* II, 343).

¹¹. Powerful churchmen did, by threatening prosecution, manage to get Hume, and his publisher Millar, to suppress the 1756 edition of the *Natural History of Religion*, in which it would have appeared accompanied by his essays "Of Suicide" and "Of the Immortality of the Soul." E.C. Mossner, in *The Life of David Hume* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), chap. 24 and app. E, discusses both this suppression and the response of Warburton and Hurd to the 1757 version of the *Natural History*. Hume's claim in *My Own Life* that their "illiberally petulant, arrogant and scurrilous" pamphlet gave him "consolation" suggests that they may have been correct in supposing that creating "public mischief" was part of his intention (see Mossner, *The Life of Hume*, 326).

The next (the ninth) paragraph gives us not general correlations, such as those of professed zeal with hypocrisy and of open impiety with secret dread, but denials of correlations that we might have reasonably expected to hold: of cultivation of mind with avoidance of theological absurdity and of avoidance of voluptuous abandon with puritanical moral views. The latter denial simply gives a specific example of the earlier truth that we tend not to live up to our professed beliefs, but the discrepancy between great cultivation of mind and avoidance of theological absurdity introduces a new point—new to the corollary, that is. That the worst absurdities in religious doctrine come about not in “barbaric” polytheism but in perversions of more intellectually refined monotheism had been the burden of the eleventh section, “Comparison with Regard to Reason or Absurdity.” Here we are reminded of this fact, that strength of understanding and cultivation of mind give no security against false and absurd religious views. This is, of course, consistent with Hume’s general analysis of religion as having its roots in human anxiety as well as in our limited ability to discern remote causes. Strength of understanding will have to be accompanied by calm of passions if the worst evils of religion are to be avoided, and experience shows us that there is little correlation between intellectual ability and emotional health. Has Hume some point to make here about the capacities that will be needed for sensible reflection on religion? Here too, surely, intellectual strength will not be enough, and, should it be employed in the service of mere anti-religious spleen, will worsen the consequent corruption of the reflective endeavour.

That ignorance is the mother of devotion may seem to be hard to square with the preceding claim that great understanding is no protection against devotion to absurd theologies. It is also in some apparent tension with the claim Hume voices immediately after it, that any people destitute of religion will assuredly be but a few degrees removed from brutes. What are we to make of this puzzling sequence of claims? We can distinguish between the acknowledged ignorance on some matters that may accompany great understanding, and the less self-conscious ignorance that is the mother of the devotion of the less cultivated believer. And we also need to distinguish the question of the causes of religious devotion from the question of the causes of absurdity in theology. But what are we to make of the claim that those destitute of religion are but a few degrees removed from brutes? Are the brutes not as ignorant as the religiously devoted? And is it not, in any case, Hume’s own *Treatise* view that all of us, religious or irreligious, are indeed only a few degrees removed from other ani-

mals, both in our intelligence and in our repertoire of passions (and none the worse for that)? What does distinguish us, on Hume's view, is the possession of language, and our consequent capacity for reflection, self-consciousness, and morality. Those of us that are less removed from brutes than others will be those who have not attained the level of reflection on our own proclivities that we are in principle capable of, or whose devotion-engendering ignorance is, like that of the brutes, unconscious of itself. The religion that such people lack will, therefore, not be ordinary religious devotion, but reflective or "true" religion. And that reflective religion will not make one exactly devoted to most of the religion that it attends to, so that, at the meta-level, ignorance (of religion and its effects) may be the mother of devotion to religion. So again, we make best sense of Hume's words if we take his main concern in the corollary to be religion in its transformed, reflective sense: calm hope; calm, informed, but also ignorance-admitting curiosity; and, where necessary, due fear; all taking as their objects religion as it has more commonly been found in the world.

The eleventh and twelfth paragraphs speak not of "religion" but of theological systems, and their mixed moral and emotional effects. The true religion, and any meta-theology it needs, will be on the watch for any unexpected bad effects that it may turn out to have, since it can scarcely know from experience that it will in fact be what it hopes to be, an exception to the law and analogy of nature that mixes evils with goods.

The final paragraph begins by an expression of that sense of incomplete understanding that is an essential ingredient in religion, and so also in reflection on religion. I take "the whole" that is in question here to be the whole of Hume's subject matter, that is to say human religious response, its varieties and causes, along with human reflection on that response. The true reflective religious attitude will include admission that some mysteries remain, that explication has its limits, and that such explication as has been offered is tentative. But the self-aware reflector on religion knows that she, like Hume, will not always achieve this modesty and absence of dogmatic certainty, since she is not free from that insecurity that breeds dogmatism, even at the reflective level. Hume's final "escape" from the perils of religion and meta-religion into the calm if obscure regions of philosophy may be read as an admission of failure to find a coherent sustainable version of reflective true religion. Insofar as we are still

subject to the forces that produce religion, inasfar as we are employing all of them at the reflective level (anxiety and fear of death¹² as well as calm curiosity, terror as well as hope), it may not be possible to achieve any more than a very modest correction of the troublesome human combination of passions, abilities, and disabilities that result in religion. The true springs and causes of popular religion may be concealed from us, nor have we wisdom to foresee or power to prevent those ills with which it continually threatens us. Faced with this partial ignorance, should we aim at a meta-religious attitude of controlled anxiety, or a more philosophical attitude? Hume escapes to the latter. But even the *philosophy* of religion, which presumably is committed to avoiding anxiety and dogmatism in order to deserve that “glorious title,” will have to admit partial defeat in its efforts to banish obscurity in our vision of the roots of religion and of the disordered scene of its continuing manifestations.

I took it upon myself to try to make Hume’s intentions in the *Natural History* a bit less obscure. Reading it as an exercise in reflection (in the narrow sense of that term that Hume often employs) does, I think, clarify some obscurities, but it leaves plenty of puzzles intact. Did Hume perhaps want his text to remain a riddle, an enigma, an inexplicable mystery? For our author, concerned as he was to suit his manner to his matter, that would be a fine reflective refinement.¹³

¹². Hume does not in the *Natural History* give much attention to the role of the fear of death as a cause of religion, but he does attend to it in “Of the Immortality of the Soul,” originally intended as a companion piece to the *Natural History*. Indeed, to get Hume’s full version of the causes and effects of religion, one must read also the two suppressed “obnoxious dissertations,” “Of Suicide” and “Of the Immortality of the Soul,” as well as the slightly less obnoxious *Natural History*.

¹³. This paper was drafted while I was in residence at the Rockefeller Study Center, Villa Serbelloni, Bellagio, Italy, where the beauty and order both of nature and of human rearrangements of nature was very striking. I am grateful for the peace, beauty, and good company that I enjoyed there.

Hume, Testimony to Miracles, the Order of Nature, and Jansenism

Alasdair MacIntyre

It is a mark of Hume's ability to raise in a permanently unsettling way the deepest philosophical issues that what often seem to be, at first and naive reading, straightforward arguments so often turn out to conceal the greatest difficulties and complexities. So it has been with his arguments in the essay on miracles, responses to and commentary upon which continue to multiply. In this paper I want to focus upon an aspect of those arguments noticed at once when they were first published, by the Aberdeen theologian the Reverend George Campbell, but less attended to in recent discussions; namely, testimony. For Hume's attack upon the reliability of testimony concerning miracles has, as he himself well recognized, implications extending beyond miracles to prophecies, and indeed, to all events central to the claims of the Jewish and Christian religions. Hume's conclusions preclude the possibility of rational assent to revelation.

In treating Hume's essay on miracles as in central part a critique of reliance upon testimony, I am, I hope, being faithful to Hume's own intentions. Hume had at first intended to include the argument against miracles in the *Treatise*; he had originally formulated it at La Fleche, in the course of a controversy with a Jesuit.¹ Had he included it, it is natural to suppose he would have done so by extending his polemic in the ninth section of the third part of Book I of the *Treatise* against belief in "apparitions, enchantments and prodigies" based on

1. J.Y.T. Greig, ed., *The Letters of David Hume*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932), 1:24, 1:361.

testimony. (John O. Nelson has produced an ingenious argument in favour of the view that Hume would have included the argument against miracles in the fourth part of Book I, but to do so Nelson has to ignore how close Hume already comes to stating it in the third part.²)

I shall also pay more attention than is usually done to Hume's relationship to Jansenism. "Miracle-working was a Popish trick," Hume wrote to Hugh Blair,³ and it is worth beginning by considering, as indeed Hume himself would have had us do, not the miraculous events of the Pentateuch or the New Testament, but those of seventeenth-century France.

I

Hume undeniably directed his argument on miracles against a wide range of religious positions, both pagan and Christian. Nonetheless, he paid particular attention in a long footnote to the miracles of the Jansenists, both those that had allegedly occurred at the tomb of the Abbé Paris and that of the alleged miraculous healing of Pascal's niece, Marguerite Périer. That Hume should have thought it peculiarly important to subvert Jansenism is unsurprising. Peter Jones, in the most thorough account to date of Hume's sources, has followed Charles W. Hendel in stressing the influence of Arnauld's *Logic* on Hume,⁴ and it is difficult to believe that Hume in writing the essay on miracles did not have it in mind to refute the conclusions of chapter 4 of Part 4 of the *Logic*, in which criteria for judging reports of miracles are formulated, criteria that, if rationally justifiable, would in fact warrant our belief in the occurrence of certain miracles.

More particularly, Hume must have been eager to discredit the view taken in the *Logic* that each particular claim about miracles must be tested by considering not only the alleged facts, but also "the faithfulness and good sense of the reporting witnesses," faithfulness and good sense that can give others sufficient reason to believe some otherwise improbable reports about miracles. Since Hume allowed that he had no doubt of the integrity and truthfulness of those who had provided a good deal of Jansenist first-hand testimony about

². "The Burial and Resurrection of Hume's Essay 'Of Miracles,'" *Hume Studies* 12 (1986), 57–76.

³. Greig, *Letters*, 1:350.

⁴. Jones, *Hume's Sentiments* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1982), 19–21.

miracles, it was important to his case against belief in the miraculous that first-hand testimony as such should be discredited.

Hume, however, not only needed to show that in drawing upon the resources of the Port-Royal *Logic*, he had not committed himself to its conclusions about miracles. He also faced the difficulty that in some respects his account of belief closely resembled that of Pascal, and hence once again he had to show that what he shared with Jansenism was compatible with his rejection of Jansenist theology. In what, then, did Hume agree with Pascal? Consider some parallels:

1. *Imagination*. It is the dominant faculty in man, master of error and falsehood, all the more deceptive for not being invariably so . . . it makes us believe, doubt, deny reason; it deadens the senses, arouses them. (*Pensées* 44)⁵

The memory, senses, and understanding are, therefore, all of them founded on the imagination, or the vivacity of our ideas. No wonder a principle so inconstant and fallacious shou'd lead us into errors. (*Treatise* I.iv.7)⁶

2. The two principles of truth, reason and senses, are not only both not genuine, but are engaged in mutual deception. The senses deceive reason through false appearances, and, just as they trick the soul, they are tricked by it in turn. (*Pensées* 45)⁷

Thus there is a direct and total opposition betwixt our reason and our senses; or more properly speaking, betwixt those conclusions we form from cause and effect, and those that persuade us of the continu'd and independent existence of body. (*Treatise* I.iv.4)⁸

3. What are our natural principles but habitual principles? In children it is the principles received from the habits of their fathers, like hunting in the case of animals. . . . Habit is a second nature that destroys the first. But what is nature? Why is habit not natural? I

⁵. The numbering in the text is that of Louis Lafuma. Blaise Pascal, *Pensées sur la Religion et sur quelques autres sujets*, ed. L. Lafuma (Paris: Éditions du Luxembourg, 1952), trans. A. J. Krailsheimer (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1960), 30.

⁶. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge and P.H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 265.

⁷. Krailsheimer, 42.

⁸. Selby-Bigge and Nidditch, 231.

am very much afraid that nature itself is only a first habit, just as habit is a second nature.” (*Pensées* 125 and 126)⁹

Beasts certainly never perceive any real connexion among objects. . . . ‘Tis therefore by means of custom alone, that experience operates upon them. All this was sufficiently evident with respect to man. . . . Nature may certainly produce whatever can arise from habit: Nay, habit is nothing but one of the principles of nature, and derives all its force from that origin.” (*Treatise* I.iii.16)¹⁰

4. What then is man to do in this state of affairs? Is he to doubt everything, to doubt whether he is awake, whether he is being pinched or burned? Is he to doubt whether he is doubting, to doubt whether he exists?

No one can go that far, and I maintain that a perfectly genuine sceptic has never existed. Nature backs up helpless reason and stops it going so wildly astray.” (*Pensées* 131)¹¹

‘Tis happy, therefore, that nature breaks the force of all sceptical arguments in time, and keeps them from having any considerable influence on the understanding.” (*Treatise* I.iv.1)¹²

Pascal and Hume, having agreed so far, therefore confronted the same dilemma. *Either* one simply yields to the inclinations of nature and discards philosophy as a source of contradiction and intellectual misery, *or* one finds a new philosophical way out or through the intellectual entanglements in which one has been trapped by philosophy. Both Pascal and Hume rejected the first alternative, but of course on the basis of very different reasoning. Pascal rejected the appeal to nature altogether: “Man without faith can know neither true good nor justice” (*Pensées* 148)¹³ and “is so happily constituted that he has no exact principle of truth” (*Pensées* 44).¹⁴ By so doing and by the rule of life that his understanding of his faith led him to adopt, he became

⁹. Krailsheimer, 61.

¹⁰. Selby-Bigge and Nidditch, 178–79.

¹¹. Krailsheimer, 64.

¹². Selby-Bigge and Nidditch, 187.

¹³. Krailsheimer, 74.

¹⁴. Krailsheimer, 42.

the object of Hume's extreme virulence: "The most ridiculous superstitions directed Pascal's faith and practice."¹⁵

A principal source of superstition and credulity on Hume's view is the "faith"—his word—that we all tend to repose in testimony. The only way to correct this tendency is to evaluate *all* testimony by the standard afforded by experience: "nor is there any thing but our *experience* of the governing principles of human nature, which can give us any assurance of the veracity of men" (*Treatise* I.iii.9, 113). How, then, is this standard of veracity to be formulated? In "Of Miracles"¹⁶ Hume points towards his answer.

Hume allows that we generally use a variety of criteria in evaluating testimony, doubting its trustworthiness "when the witnesses contradict each other; when they are but few, of a suspicious character; when they have an interest in what they affirm; when they deliver their testimony with hesitation, or on the contrary, with too violent asseverations" (112–13). Yet we derive these multiple criteria from a single "ultimate standard," that which is "derived from experience and observation" (112). But whose experience and observation? Hume did not answer this question in "Of Miracles." But he did supply an answer in a letter of 1761 to Hugh Blair, responding to George Campbell's *A Dissertation on Miracles*,¹⁷ which Blair had sent him in manuscript: "No man can have any other experience but his own. The experience of others becomes his only by the credit he gives to their testimony; which proceeds from his own experience of human nature."¹⁸

Hume, however, in his arguments concerning miracles had to give a very large place indeed to the experience of others. He had defined a miracle as a transgression of a law of nature, and he understood a law of nature as a universal generalization established only by "uniform experience," so that a claim that a miracle has occurred is a claim that something has occurred that "has never been observed, in any age or country" (115). It was Hume's appeal to universal, uniform human experience, and therefore indirectly to

¹⁵. "A Dialogue," in *Enquiries concerning Human Understanding and concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge and P.H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 343.

¹⁶. *An Enquiry concerning the Human Understanding*, in *ibid.*, X. In what follows, parenthetical page references are to this edition.

¹⁷. Edinburgh: 1762.

¹⁸. Greig, *Letters*, 1:349.

testimonies to types of uniformity belief in which could never have been justified by reference only to the limited uniformities of his own experience, that George Campbell had seen as rendering Hume's argument vulnerable to crucial objections.

For in accepting the veracity of those who afford us this testimony, we all, like Hume, inescapably rely upon tests of veracity supported only in the most limited way, if at all, by our own testimony-independent experience. Campbell in effect confronted Hume with a dilemma: *either* Hume must genuinely restrict himself to his own experience, in which case he can have no adequate grounds for asserting those uniformities of experience by appeal to which the occurrence of miracles is to be shown to be unworthy of belief, *or* he must appeal to the experience of others to an extent that compels him to rely upon testimony to some large degree unsupported by his own experience. Thus, in attempting to discredit miracles he is matching "testimony against testimony" and not testimony against experience.¹⁹

To this Hume might of course have replied that testimony consistent both with one's own experience and with all such other testimony as bears witness to the uniformities of human experience is surely to be preferred to testimony asserting the occurrence of events at odds with such uniformities. This principle, however, cannot itself be derived from experience, and hence our assent to *it* could not be, in Hume's words, "regulated by" experience. It may seem, therefore, that it could only be adopted, in a way consistent with Hume's epistemology, as a principle that has impressed itself upon us a result of fancy and custom. But if this is so, the issue between Hume and Pascal arises not from the fact that the latter relies on testimony where the former does not, but from their disagreement about what pre-rational principles to invoke in deciding what weight to give to different types of testimony. Hume, then, was closer to being a secularized Jansenist than he himself was able to recognize. (Note that the parallels between Humean and Jansenist positions extend further than I have noticed here. Hume's account of liberty and blameworthiness, for example, according to which actions may be fully determined by intercedent causes but yet blameworthy [*Enquiry* III], reiterates the proposition ascribed to the Jansenists and condemned by Innocent X in the bull *Cum Occasione*, that grace so operates on our fallen nature that actions, to be meritorious, need not

¹⁹. Campbell, *A Dissertation on Miracles*, 38–45.

be free of internal necessity, but only of external constraint. I do not doubt that Hume's openness to Jansenist positions derived partly from his early Calvinist upbringing, but the evidence adduced by Peter Jones and others strongly suggests the direct influence of Jansenist thought.)

Moreover, Campbell's objection to Hume's thesis is not the only compelling objection. For while Hume is doubtless right in holding that we can evaluate testimony only by appeal to experience, he is surely wrong in his identification of the kind of experience appropriate to such evaluation. We are able to evaluate someone's testimony only by examining our own experience of that particular person's past trustworthiness, and perhaps also our experience of the past trustworthiness of persons of that kind. And when we learn that that particular person throughout a long, sane, and virtuous life, although often provided with opportunities to practice successful deception when it would have been strongly in his or her interest to do so, has uniformly resisted such temptations, *and* furthermore is a member of a sect universally applauded for truthfulness and integrity, *and* furthermore always has been a deeply scrupulous and careful investigator—when we learn, that is, that someone is the sort of person Pascal was and was recognized by Hume to be—then the uniformity of our experience makes the probability of the truth of any testimony by that person so great that it must outweigh the improbability of any event reported in such testimony.

Just because and insofar as our confidence in testimony rests upon uniform experience, testimony, so it might be argued in an inversion of Hume's argument, can have a kind of warrant from experience that cannot be defeated by the exceptional character of some event reported by such testimony. The principle appealed to in this counter-argument, a principle that gives priority to one type of uniform experience over another, just as Hume's own principle does, once again cannot itself be derived from experience, any more than Hume's can. The decision as to which of the two rival principles to adopt would therefore once again, if we were to rely upon Hume's epistemology, be a matter of which of the two has impressed itself upon us as a result of fancy and custom. In this respect, Hume's argument against miracles fails once more in its own terms.

Yet one of Hume's conclusions at least survives this failure. Hume had envisaged an opponent who appeals to the evidence afforded by miracles to provide what Hume calls "the foundation of a system of religion." And insofar as it is this opponent whose claims are being denied, Hume is in the right. For the question of how

testimony concerning the occurrence of some alleged miracle is to be evaluated cannot be answered independently of certain other questions about the nature and existence of God. What we rationally take to be probable or improbable, possible or impossible, will vary with whether or not we believe that there is or is not an omnipotent and omniscient God. Certain types of event will, if we assume there is no such God, be so improbable as to be, if not unworthy of belief in any circumstance whatsoever, very nearly so. If we believe that there is such a God, or even only that it is seriously possible that there is such a God, we shall not be entitled to treat those same types of event as thus improbable. So, *both* theist and atheist seem to be involved in very much the same circularity. And no non-circular support for testimony concerning the occurrence of miracles, other than that afforded by whatever grounds there are for trusting the witnesses who have provided that testimony, is to be found. But the support afforded by witnesses who deserve to be judged entirely trustworthy is always at best only support for the occurrence of some certainly exceptional and apparently inexplicable type of event, and that, as I shall argue later, is not in itself support for the occurrence of a miracle. Hume himself perhaps came close to recognizing this in allowing that it was consistent with his disbelief in miracles to admit that remarkable events of a kind not hitherto experienced by anyone whatsoever might be of such a type that testimony to their occurrence could outweigh denials based upon the uniformity of experience hitherto. Perhaps, he says, there have never been any such. But he imagines a case in which “from the first of January 1600, there was a total darkness over the whole earth for eight days” (127), an event belief in which is supported by every relevant kind of testimony “without the least variation or contradiction.” When testimony thus supports the occurrence of such an event, we “ought to receive it as certain, and ought to search for the causes whence it might be derived.” He is, however, prepared to admit it only because in addition to the “very extensive and uniform” testimony, there are “so many analogies” with familiar experiences that render such an event probable. Is this then mere prejudice, the prejudice arising from fancy and custom, on Hume’s part in favour of the familiar? Or is more at stake where miracles are concerned than issues of whether testimony to their occurrence could, as Pascal sometimes seems to claim, provide “the foundation of a system of religion”?

II

Hume was in fact claiming much more than that testimony concerning miracles could never by itself provide the foundation of a system of religion. This is the relatively modest conclusion that Antony Flew ascribes to him, arguing that Hume did not seek to show that “violations of the usual course of nature are impossible” and that, since Hume does speak of a miracle as a violation of “the usual course of nature” and earlier of “the common course of nature,” he believed miracles, thus understood, to be at least possible—although there is in fact no worthwhile testimony to any such.²⁰ Terence Penelhum, going beyond Flew in asserting that Hume did deny the possibility of the occurrence of miracles, ascribes this denial to Hume’s intemperateness. Hume’s argument, so Penelhum suggests, entitles him only to “the more modest claim that the nature of the story makes it more rational to refrain from accepting it, if testimony alone is what supports it.”²¹ But Robert J. Fogelin has contended not only that Hume asserted that “there is here a direct and full proof, from the nature of the fact, against the existence of any miracle,” but that he used this as a premiss—in conjunction with other premisses—to derive the further conclusion that no testimony can provide rationally adequate grounds for belief that a miracle has occurred.²² How should we respond to Hume, thus radically interpreted?

The definition of “a miracle” relied upon by Hume in so arguing is that which equates it with “a violation of the laws of nature” (114) and “a transgression of the laws of nature by a particular volition of the Deity, or by the interposition of some invisible agent” (115). A statement of a law of nature, on Hume’s view, as I noticed earlier, reports some uniform and invariant experience of regularity. Now, it is indeed true that if that is how laws of nature are to be understood, there cannot be violations of them. For were an event to occur that appeared to violate what had hitherto been supposed to be a law of nature, its occurrence would presumably be sufficient to show that the relevant regularity was not in fact uniform and invariant. Hence, what had been believed to be a law of nature was not after all such,

²⁰. *Hume’s Philosophy of Belief* (New York: Humanities Press, 1961), chap. 8.

²¹. *Hume* (London: Macmillan, 1975), 178.

²². “What Hume Actually Said about Miracles,” *Hume Studies* 16 (1990): 81–86. For Flew’s reply to Fogelin, see “Fogelin on Hume on Miracles,” *Hume Studies* 16 (1990): 141–44.

and no violation of it could have occurred. So why should not Jews or Christians respond to Hume by agreeing that violations of laws of nature thus understood cannot occur and pointing out that they, by contrast, share Aquinas's conception of a miracle as something not occurring in the accustomed natural course of things, which therefore requires a cause exceeding the power (*facultas*) of nature?²³ Hume's rejection of the possibility of miracles involves, they might say, a conception of miracle that has nothing to do with biblical religion or sound theology.²⁴ If Jews and Christians added further that, for reasons that I have already suggested, they concur with Hume in holding that testimony to the occurrence of miracles could not by itself provide the foundation of a system of religion, what would there be left for Hume to quarrel about?

If we press this question, we discover, I believe, an underlying thesis to which Hume is committed and that is the presupposition of his arguments: that nature, as it is disclosed to experience, is so structured as to exclude the occurrence of any event that is not explicable by some law of nature. So, Hume believes that "a firm and unalterable experience has established" laws according to which "all men must die," and hence "it is a miracle, that a dead man should come to life, because that has never been observed, in any age or country" (114–15). We already therefore know in advance of any evidence, whether from testimony or otherwise, that it cannot have been the case that Lazarus was raised from the dead, and we therefore also know that the apostolic testimony to that event must be insufficient. The disagreement about miracles between Hume on the one hand and Jews and Christians on the other is thus rooted in a difference about nature and about the findings of natural science. How should this difference be characterized?

Both parties can agree that the dominant view of modern natural science, as it was known to Hume and as it had then and has since historically developed, leaves no room for the application of any concept of miracle. This dominant view is part of the thesis that Fred Wilson imputes to Hume in "The Logic of Probabilities in Hume's Argument against Miracles," for Hume believed, on Wilson's interpretation (which I take to be correct) that "the practice of science" includes "the rule that for any event *there is* a law which explains

²³. *Summa Theologiae* Ia, q. 105, a. 7.

²⁴. See Penelhum, *Hume*, 177.

it.”²⁵ So Hume held *both* that science leaves no place for the miraculous *and* that every event, whatever its character, is explicable and only explicable by natural science.

If this is right, then there are in fact two distinct, but interdependent, lines of argument that Hume is attempting to deploy against belief in the miraculous, one derived from his empiricism and a second from his naturalism. It is the empiricism that is invoked in Hume’s initial critique of testimony, but the naturalism that underlies his denial that miracles occur is then used to reinforce that critique. The empiricist argument (from “And as the evidence, derived from witnesses and human testimony, is founded on past experience” to “The incredibility of a fact, it was allowed, might invalidate so great an authority [112–13]) begins from the nature of experience and concludes that even apparently trustworthy testimony concerning miracles ought to be rejected, while the naturalistic argument (114–16) passes, as Fogelin observes, from asserting the impossibility of miracles in nature as we experience it to the same conclusion concerning the incredibility of testimony.

III

Jews and Christians, the two principal groups against whom Hume aims both his arguments and his mockery, are committed by their beliefs to contesting both of Hume’s central positions with respect to miracles, that concerning testimony and that concerning the relationship of miracles to the order of nature. Hume’s argument, as I have noticed, moves back and forth between these two position, but since they raise some quite distinct issues, it is worth considering them separately. I begin with testimony.

In the course of discussing Campbell’s objection to Hume’s argument, I advanced two theses, each of which had to do with those antecedent principles that are necessarily presupposed in any evaluation of testimony to the occurrence of an alleged miracle. A first thesis was that there is more than one principle that may be used to evaluate the worth of the testimony of others by an appeal to one’s own experience, and that Hume fails to give us any good reason for not preferring a principle that appeals to one’s own experience of the integrity, honesty, intelligence, and sanity or otherwise of those who provide the testimony, rather than adopting, as Hume does, a prin-

²⁵. *Hume Studies* 15 (1989): 264.

ciple according to which the unprecedented character of some alleged event *must* outweigh *any* knowledge that we have of the integrity, honesty, intelligence, and sanity of those who testify to its occurrence. A second thesis was that, in evaluating testimony to the kind of event that may be understood as a miracle, what any particular person takes to be a likely rather than an unlikely story will necessarily depend in key part upon what that person already believes about the existence, nature, and purposes of God.

Both theses allow that, under certain conditions, one is rationally justified to conclude from a particular body of testimony that it is more probable than not that a miracle has occurred. But in respect of certain miracles—those, for example, involved in the deliverance of Israel from the Egyptians, which Hume describes as “their deliverance from bondage by prodigies the most astonishing imaginable” and which he includes among those from the Pentateuch presented as paradigm cases of incredibility by anyone rational—both Jews and Christians require a kind of assent that can be expressed only by an unqualified affirmation that a miracle has occurred, and not at all by an assertion that it is more probable than not that one has occurred. What more, then, is involved in the former than in the latter?

Both Jews and Christians believe that world history is the setting for a sacred history of events, many of which are miraculous and many of which are utterances of prophetic or apostolic testimony to the occurrence of the miraculous. Every miracle that is a part of that history is understood as directed to particular persons for some particular purpose. Prophetic and apostolic testimony is intended to provide evidence, in this sense: that it makes evident what God has done, both in relation to the particular persons addressed and more generally. Such testimony may of course also be used as evidence in another sense, evidence as it is appealed to in either law courts or laboratories, in order to make inferences about what events observable to the senses, and characterizable as such without any theological reference, may or may not have actually occurred. If understood as evidence in this latter sense, it has of course to be weighed against other considerations in arriving at conclusions about what has happened. But insofar as it is being treated as evidence in this latter sense, it is no longer being considered as prophetic or apostolic testimony. For such testimony claims to be authoritative and requires immediate assent and obedience to the teaching embodied in it. The authority so claimed is ultimate, beyond every other earthly authority. And the authority of what is said is inseparable from the office of whoever it is that says what is said,

whether law giver or other prophet in the case of Judaism, or in addition apostle or successor of the apostles in that version of Judaism which is Christianity. Moreover, that authority has these characteristics is something itself to be learned only by assenting to that same authority. There can therefore be no standard external to authoritative testimony by reference to which it can be tested or evaluated. There can be no epistemological defence of authoritative testimony.

Because what prophetic or apostolic authority teaches through its testimony is held to be *true*, its claims must conform to three consistency requirements. They must be reasonably consistent with what we have good reason to believe about the natural world. They must be internally consistent to a reasonable degree. And they must be similarly consistent with what we have good reason to believe about the nature of God, prior to and independently of that knowledge of God which becomes ours only through assent to and appropriation of the teaching of prophetic and apostolic authority.²⁶

There could therefore be sufficient rational grounds for disbelieving what presented itself as authoritative testimony, including such testimony about miracles. But even the satisfaction of all three of these consistency conditions could not of itself provide us with sufficient reason for assenting to such testimony and asserting categorically that a miracle had in fact occurred. What is assented to by such a categorical assertion requires a recognition that God has made of an exceptional event a means of addressing particular persons and perhaps human beings in general, a recognition of a kind that requires and can have no further evidence. Yet in committing her- or himself by such an act of assent, the Jew or Christian has also committed her- or himself to the judgement that the event taken to be miraculous is indeed exceptional in that it is not explicable in terms of the accustomed order of nature and, that is to say, that it is therefore inexplicable by any of the natural sciences. So, Jewish and Christian disagreement with Hume about the nature and status of prophetic or apostolic testimony—for Hume in his argument treats prophetic and apostolic along with all other testimony as nothing but evidence in the sense proper to law courts and laboratories—also involves a large disagreement about how nature is to be conceived. A theology of miracles involves the claim that not all observable events

²⁶. On the importance of such prior knowledge see my "Which God Ought We to Obey and Why?", *Faith and Philosophy* 3, no. 4 (1986).

can be comprehended within the types of explanation advanced by natural scientists. Naturalism has to be rejected as in error not only about theology itself, but also about natural science.

Aquinas distinguished three types of event in which a power is exhibited that is other than and greater than those powers exerted within the natural order to which the natural scientist appeals in proposing explanations.²⁷ The first type occurs when the event itself is of a kind that never occurs within the natural order; a second type occurs when an event of a kind to be found within nature occurs in circumstances in which the powers of the natural order never bring about that type of event; and yet a third type occurs when an event of a kind that is indeed sometimes brought about by natural powers in those particular circumstances is brought about in a way that bypasses the sequences of the natural order. An example of this third type is the immediate curing of a fever from which it would have taken a long time to recover if only the natural order had been involved. The second type is exemplified in the conferring of sight not through the natural processes by which members of various species come to see, but by the healing of someone who was, so far as the powers of the natural order were concerned, incurably blind. And an event of the first type would occur if a human body were glorified, or a star or planet altered its position other than as regularities of the natural order dictate. What kind of philosophy of science is able to do justice both to the powers and regularities of the natural order and to the occurrence of miracles?

IV

The requisite philosophy of science can only be one that warrants a rejection of three features of the presentation of scientific theories that are integral to the presently dominant view of the natural sciences, but which are in fact imposed upon the findings of the sciences, rather than being part of what natural scientists discover by observation and experiment. What are these features?

First, the discoveries of natural scientists—in physics and chemistry at least—are framed in terms of what are construed as necessary and invariant laws. The physical sciences so construed purport to tell us not how nature generally and characteristically is, but how, necessarily and universally, it must be. Exceptions to the formula-

²⁷. *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 105, a. 8.

tions of such laws hitherto proposed are, of course, recognized. But their recognition is no more than a stage in a progress towards some final, even if perhaps distant, reformulation in which the exceptionless and uniform workings of nature will have been truly captured by the statement of scientific laws. Some of these ultimate laws may well be probabilistic in form, but what such probabilistic generalizations capture, when they are adequate to the phenomena, are portrayed as relationships between sets of events or states of affairs, relationships as uniform and necessary as are the relationships between single events or states of affairs characterized by deterministic laws. Any genuine recognition of chance, let alone of providential intervention, is as alien to modern physics thus understood as it is to Newtonian physics.

Second, natural science thus envisaged is understood as in progress towards a complete account not only of the laws governing nature, but also of the phenomena of nature. Science is to leave no gaps in our understanding of nature, no room for anomalous or exceptional occurrences. Every event and state of affairs must be characterizable so that it can be explained as the outcome of some antecedent physical event or state of affairs, whether it is itself characterized in physical terms or in some other terms, biological or psychological or social.

Hence derives a third feature ascribed to the theoretical accounts of the natural scientist from the standpoint of the dominant contemporary view of the natural sciences. Those accounts are to be such that what occurs at levels other than that of the most fundamental physical entities and laws can be understood as somehow or other determined by what occurs at that level. Every change in the world is, or is a function of, so it is held, some physical change. In the past it was hoped to provide such accounts by bringing to a successful outcome a variety of reductionist programs. But although there have been striking successes in carrying through such programs in some areas of science, there are others in which it is by now clear that such reductionist hopes are, to say the least, highly implausible. What has replaced reductionism as an overall program is what John F. Post has called the "Principle of the Determination of all Truth by Physical Truth," which defines a relation of determination between classes of sentences, such that if it holds, then

“given the way things are physically, there is one and only one way they can be nonphysically.”²⁸

By contrast, anyone who believes that the Jewish and Christian miracles did indeed occur and that miracles continue to occur must also believe that, insofar as scientific accounts of natural phenomena are structured in terms of these three features, they can only distort what they purport to represent. What the adherents of the presently dominant view of natural science construe as necessary and universal law-like generalizations, such a believer will construe instead as rules specifying the normal and usual course of nature, rules that certainly hold for the vast majority of relevant cases—since the theological point of miraculous events requires them to be relatively rare events—but not for all. What the adherents of the dominant view understand as a potentially complete and all-inclusive account of nature, such a believer will understand as a set of accounts affording a perspective, or rather a set of somewhat different perspectives, on nature, perspectives from which it is possible to characterize the natural world in a way that makes it generally, but never entirely, explicable. And what the adherents of the dominant view see as progress from reduction to determination in successive restatements of physicalism, such a person will see as a regress from refutable and from time to time refuted versions of materialism to a finally unfalsifiable version.

Is there anywhere where can we find a statement of such a view? A number of different authors at different periods in the history of science have, of course, questioned one or other of the tenets of what I have called the presently dominant view. C. S. Peirce in “The Doctrine of Necessity” not only argued against a nineteenth-century predecessor of that view by pointing out that the observations generally adduced in its favour “simply prove that there is an element of regularity in nature, and have no bearing whatever upon the question of whether such regularity is exact and universal or not,” but also noted that the rise of that view had been in part contingent upon increasing scepticism about miracles.²⁹ Michael Polanyi emphasized how, on occasion, anomalous scientific observations can be

²⁸. *The Faces of Existence: An Essay in Nonreductive Metaphysics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), 184–85.

²⁹. *The Monist* 2, no. 3 (1892); reprinted in *Values in a Universe of Chance*, ed. Philip P. Wiener (New York: Doubleday, 1958), 170, 163.

“committed to oblivion, without ever having been disproved.”³⁰ But for a statement in more systematic, even if highly compressed, terms of the type of alternative account of natural science that belief in the miraculous requires, one author to whom we are able to resort is—unsurprisingly perhaps—none other than Pascal.

“There are reasons which from afar look as though they restrict our view,” wrote Pascal in a fragment concerned with miracles, “but when we come closer we begin to see beyond them. . . . There is no rule, we say, to which there is no exception . . .” (*Pensées* 574).³¹ And commenting on “*spongia solis*” he declared that “when we see the same effect always occurring, we conclude that it is necessarily so by nature, like the fact that it will dawn tomorrow etc., but nature often gives us the lie and does not obey its own rules” (*Pensées* 660).³² We need, therefore, a variety of strategies, a variety of methods of proof, and a variety of types of conclusion: “Different kinds of right thinking, some in a particular order of things but not in others where they go quite astray” (*Pensées* 551).³³

Pascal’s fragmented thoughts, however, are not our only possible resort. A Thomistic Aristotelian understanding of the order of nature provides a standpoint—differing both from the modern conception and from Pascal’s—from which the error of modern conceptions of the natural sciences lies not in the aspiration to completeness in respect of their various subject matters, but in the belief that the natural order can be wholly understood in terms that exclude teleological causation. That exclusion is most obvious in those areas in which explanation in terms of human purposes and the proper functioning of human powers and capacities on the one hand, and explanation in terms of the types of efficient, material, and formal causality recognized within contemporary physics and chemistry on the other, have to be reconciled. It is notable that from the point of view of some of the most serious exponents of what I have taken to be the dominant modern view of the natural sciences, applications of the concept of human purpose themselves now appear to be disturbing and superstitious intrusions into the non-teleological order of nature, of very much the same kind as applications of the concept of divine purpose—whether in claims about miracles or more generally about di-

³⁰. *Personal Knowledge* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 293.

³¹. Krailsheimer, 224.

³². Krailsheimer, 241.

³³. Krailsheimer, 220.

vine providence—appeared to Hume. It is a Thomistic contention that an adequate conception of nature as, among other things, a teleological order would provide a framework within which neither of these would appear anomalous.

What I hope, therefore, that the argument of this paper has made clear is that the issues raised by Hume's responses to Pascal and the Jansenists have to be placed in a wider context. What verdict we pass upon Hume's argument against both the credibility of testimony concerning miracles and the possibility of miracles depends not only upon matters of philosophical detail, but also upon how we answer large and systematic questions.³⁴

³⁴. I am grateful for important comments on an earlier draft of this paper by Alvin Plantinga and Jean Porter.

The Legitimation of Factual Necessity

Antony Flew

1. What Is to Be Done?

One of Terry Penelhum's first major philosophical publications was an article published in *Mind* in 1960.¹ In the years between, many of us have been recommending this as still the best available treatment of divine necessity. In the course of his devastating refutation of the famous Leibnizian argument that proceeds from the contingency of the universe to the existence of a logically necessary being, Penelhum reached the elegantly decisive conclusion that "the Principle of Sufficient Reason is demonstrably false" (182).

(a) Having here disposed of the notion of a logically necessary being, and hence of the hope that the existence of God might be demonstrated as constituting the existence of such a being, he then attended briefly to the suggestion that there is another sort of necessity that might be attributed to God: "A thing is necessary if it is indispensable. For want of a better phrase I shall call necessity in this sense 'factual necessity'" (185).

But, of course, it is one thing to attribute such a predicate to some known subject, and quite another to postulate the existence of a special super-subject to which that predicate is to be attributed: "If there is a factually necessary being, then this fact, though the most important fact there is, could not be proved" (186).

(b) I want here to consider, and in considering to legitimate, this notion of factual (or physical or contingent) as opposed to logical necessity. It, as well as the correlative notion of factual as opposed to logical impossibility, seems to have been neglected by philosophers.

1. "Divine Necessity," *Mind* 69 (1960): 175–186.

That neglect is understandable, since all those who have been to school with Hume seem to have become persuaded of his success in delegitimizing such ideas.

The exercise of showing that and why Hume was after all mistaken on this count is entirely appropriate to the present Festschrift. For Penelhum has made substantial contributions to Hume scholarship. However, in order to show what I want to show, I shall have to recycle here most of the materials contained in my “Hume and Physical Necessity.”²

2. The Reluctance to Admit Factual Necessities and Impossibilities

It is most remarkable, and a powerful tribute to the influence of Hume, that philosophers giving accounts of the nature of laws of nature have been so reluctant to admit ideas of factual necessity and factual impossibility. Exceptionally, in *The Poverty of Historicism*, Sir Karl Popper writes: “As I have shown elsewhere, every natural law can be expressed by asserting that *such and such a thing cannot happen*; that is to say, by a sentence in the form of the proverb: ‘You can’t carry water in a sieve.’”³ But this is, ultimately, a rule-proving exception. For when we follow the reference back to section 15 of *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* we find no mention of any form of modality. It appears that natural laws say nothing about any kind of necessity or impossibility. They simply assert “the non-existence of certain things or states of affairs . . . : they rule them out. And it is precisely because they do this that they are *falsifiable*.”⁴

Again, in section 17, “Theories about the Logical Character of Natural Laws,” of his *Probability and Induction* William Kneale distinguishes “four theories which are the only suggestions concerning the logical character of natural laws which have been put forward by philosophers.”⁵ None of these suggestions employ any idea of necessity other than the logical. (It was Kneale’s own development of a suggestion involving that idea that caused the young lions in Oxford

². Originally published in the July 1990 issue of *Iyyun* (Jerusalem). I thank the editor for generously granting me his permission so to do.

³. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957, 61.

⁴. Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (London: Hutchinson, 1959), 69.

⁵. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949, 77.

at that time to put down *Probability and Induction* as a “deplorably reactionary book.”)

A little later, in *Scientific Explanation: A Study of the Function of Theory, Probability and Law in Science*, R.B. Braithwaite discussed “the nature of the difference . . . between ‘nomic laws’ and ‘mere generalizations.’”⁶ In a characteristically robust fashion, he announced: “In common with most of the scientists who have written on the philosophy of science, from Ernst Mach and Karl Pearson to Harold Jeffreys, I agree with the principal part of Hume’s thesis—the part asserting that universals of law are objectively just universals of fact, and that in nature there is no extra element of necessary connexion.”⁷

Or, yet again, consider the treatment of “the nature of nomic universality” in what was to become for a generation or more the standard English-language textbook for courses in the philosophy of science. In *The Structure of Science: Problems in the Logic of Scientific Explanation*, while discussing the question “Are laws logically necessary?”, Ernest Nagel takes it that the only alternative to logical necessity is “that the necessity of universals of law is *sui generis* and . . . not further analyzable . . . a property whose nature is essentially obscure Moreover, since . . . this allegedly special type of necessity can be recognized only by some ‘intuitive apprehension,’ predicating such necessity . . . is subject to all the vagaries of intuitive judgments.”⁸

It is not surprising that Nagel, having persuaded himself that that is indeed the only alternative, concurs with Hume’s “central thesis—namely, that universals of law can be explicated without employing irreducibly modal notions like ‘physical necessity’ or ‘physical Possibility,’” and hence proceeds to offer an outline of “an essentially Humean interpretation of nomic universality.”⁹

Even twenty-one years later, in *The Rationality of Science*, W.H. Newton-Smith remains eager to escape any accusation of countenancing “*de re* necessity.” So we are supposed to be reassured by being told that his own version of “causal realism does not commit us . . . to *de re* necessity.” (“A necessary truth,” he explains, “is *de dicto* if

⁶. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953, 293.

⁷. *Ibid.*, 294, emphasis added.

⁸. New York and London: Harcourt, Brace and World/Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961, 52–53.

⁹. *Ibid.*, 56.

its necessity arises from our linguistic practices,” but “*de re* if its necessity arises from the way the world is.”¹⁰

3. What Hume’s Account Omits

The final part of the final section of Hume’s first *Enquiry* concludes triumphantly:

If we reason *a priori*, any thing may appear able to produce any thing. The falling of a pebble may, for aught we know, extinguish the sun; or the wish of a man controul the planets in their orbits. It is only experience, which teaches us the nature and bounds of cause and effect, and enables us to infer the existence of one object from that of another.¹¹

When, in the *Treatise*, Hume believes that he has established this great negative contention, he proceeds to his investigations of the necessity of causes. If it is not necessarily true either that certain sorts of things must have certain sorts of causes or even that every event must have some sort of cause, then the question arises: “*What is our idea of necessity, when we say that two objects are necessarily connected together?*”¹² Since he holds it “more probable, that these expressions do here lose their true meaning by being *wrong apply’d*, than that they never have any meaning,”¹³ Hume becomes committed to searching for the parent impression.

(a) To appreciate the nature and the limitations of his answers it is, as so often elsewhere, crucially important to recognize certain Cartesian presuppositions of Hume’s philosophical thinking. For Descartes himself, and for many of his other successors both before and after Hume, this started from positions reached in the first two paragraphs of Part IV of the *Discourse on the Method*. So when Hume is on what he sees as his philosophically best behaviour—though not of course in ordinary everyday life, dining with friends and so on—he becomes committed to thinking of himself as an essentially incorporeal subject of consciousness, inescapably trapped behind what has in our century been christened a “veil of appearance.” For such an

¹⁰. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981, 171, 170.

¹¹. *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge and P. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 164.

¹². Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge and P. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), I.iii.14, 155.

¹³. *Ibid.*, I.iii.14, 162.

incorporeal subject the only possibilities of agency must lie in the production or prevention of (its own) mental contents; while to say that it was inextricably enwrapped in its veil of appearance is to say that it never was and never could be immediately aware of any mind-independent realities.¹⁴ As Berkeley had put it, in the completely confident and categorical first sentence of *The Principles of Human Knowledge*, “It is evident to anyone who takes a survey of the objects of human knowledge . . . that they are . . . ideas.”

Of course, Hume was pleased to relabel the “ideas” of his immediate predecessors “perceptions of the mind,” to be subdivided then into dull Humean ideas or vivid Humean impressions. But the substantial commitment continuing through these verbal modifications required him to conceive both of perceptions as not necessarily either involving or involved in actual perception, and of experience as not requiring or guaranteeing contact with anything situated in what philosophers in the Cartesian tradition came to call the external world.¹⁵

A moment’s reflection is sufficient to reveal how peculiarly philosophical and wholly unordinary these usages are. For if someone claims to have seen things non-existent—such as fairies or dragons—then we put this down as that person’s having, at best, not seen but “seen” (in disclaimer quotes) those non-existents; while it would be in the last degree imprudent for persons seeking some employment requiring experience of, say, cows to refer in their applications exclusively to their havings of generously abundant cow dreams and cow hallucinations.

(b) Constrained as he is by his Cartesian presuppositions, Hume cannot discover the source of the idea of “causal necessity” in his active dealings as a creature of flesh and blood, both with others of his kind and with all manner of fellow denizens of the external world: “It must, therefore, be deriv’d from some internal impression, or impression of reflection.”¹⁶ The conclusion then seems inescapable:

¹⁴. I write “it” and “its” rather than “he” and “his” in deference to the sexless implications of incorporeality.

¹⁵. For more on this crucial distinction between the everyday and the peculiarly philosophical senses of “experience” and various associated terms see, for instance, my *An Introduction to Western Philosophy*, rev’d ed. (London and Indianapolis: Thames and Hudson/Bobbs-Merrill, 1989).

¹⁶. *Treatise* I.iii.14, 165. Presumably it is this move that misled Nagel to assume that the only alternative to logical necessity must be a “special type of necessity . . . recognized . . . by some ‘intuitive apprehension’ . . . subject to all the vagaries of

“Either we have no idea of necessity, or necessity is nothing but that determination of the thought to pass from causes to effects and from effects to causes, according to their experienc’d union.”¹⁷

Hume’s own story “of what really takes place” involves a projection of a sort of psychological necessity, a felt “determination of the mind.” This story he epitomizes in two so-called definitions. The fact that, without alleging any ambiguity in the word “cause,” he offers not one but two, which are manifestly not equivalent, should have but has not always alerted his critics. As later in his treatment of moral judgement, what Hume is here offering is not descriptive definitions of a word, but accounts of what goes on when we employ that word correctly.¹⁸

The two “definitions” are in the *Treatise* given as “presenting a different view of the same object, and making us consider it either as a *philosophical* or as a *natural* relation.”¹⁹ Relations of the former sort relate things or objects under investigation; the latter relate ideas in the minds of investigators. The labels are confusing, and the situation is not much helped if we try to associate philosophical relations with natural philosophy and natural relations with human nature.

(c) Insofar as our interests are philosophical, Hume’s accounts of causation as a natural relation have little to offer us. For when anyone asserts that this is a or the cause of that, they are certainly not saying anything about either their own associations of ideas or their lack of such associations.²⁰ We should, however, remember that on Hume’s principles, to track down the impression from which the idea of causally necessary connection is derived must be to legitimate that idea. Nevertheless, and very understandably, he himself at times

intuitive judgements.” Compare C.J. Ducasse on how “in a world of pure experience such as Hume’s there cannot be, even in the ‘subjective’ half of the world, such a thing as a ‘propensity’ in the usual, essentially dynamic, meaning of the term” (*Causation and the Types of Necessity* [Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1924], 9).

¹⁷. *Treatise* I.iii.14, 166.

¹⁸. Or perhaps in this case, although not that of moral judgement, accounts of all that we can know, as opposed to all that we naturally believe, to be going on. Compare Galen Strawson, *The Secret Connection* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989). A similar qualification should be taken as written in several similar contexts below.

¹⁹. I.iii.14, 170.

²⁰. Compare Braithwaite’s account of the difference “between what are laws of nature and what anti-Humeans contemptuously call ‘mere generalizations.’” It is an account that “makes the application of the notion dependent upon the way in which the hypothesis is regarded . . . as having been established: ‘lawlike’ may be thought of as an honorific epithet employed as a mark of origin” (*Scientific Explanation*, 300, 302).

appears inclined to see his supposed discoveries here as providing not so much a legitimation, and perhaps clarification, of a fundamental and indispensable notion, but rather the revelatory detection of the true source of a popular misconception.

(d) In the *Treatise*, causation as a philosophical relation is defined as involving “an object precedent and contiguous to another, and where all the objects resembling the former are plac’d in like relations of precedency and contiguity to those objects, that resemble the latter.”²¹ But when later Hume came “to cast . . . that work anew” there was a very significant addition, made without explanation or justification. We now have, much as before, “an object, followed by another, and where all the objects, similar to the first, are followed by objects similar to the second.” But here a second clause follows: “Or in other words, where, if the first object had not been, the second never had existed.”²²

That second clause is neither equivalent to nor deducible from its predecessor. This non-equivalence is of quite crucial importance. Certainly, the first clause does faithfully epitomize Hume’s account of causation as a philosophical relation: all that there demonstrably is out there in the external world—or, for that matter, in the minds studied by those whom Hartley was later to christen psychologists—is constant conjunction and regular succession. This relation can be sufficiently symbolized as a material implication—not as a matter of fact so-and-so and not such-and-such. If this were indeed all that there was to it, then it would no longer be, as in fact it is, self-contradictory and irrecoverably absurd to talk of backwards causation.²³

The crux for us is this. Whereas the first clause of this revised definition does faithfully epitomize Hume’s account of causation as a philosophical relation, the second expresses a proposition of a kind that no such account can entail, yet that every causal and indeed every other nomological (nomic) proposition must entail. Hume’s throwaway addition is, therefore, something that no Humean account can embrace, yet something for which any alternative that is to be

²¹. *Treatise* I.iii.14, 170.

²². *Enquiry* VII.ii, 76.

²³. For supporting argument compare my contribution to the discussion, “Could an Effect Precede Its Cause?”, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, supp. vol. 28 (1954); also Pt. 3, “Paranormal Precognition: Its Meaning; Its Implications,” in *Readings in the Philosophical Problems of Parapsychology*, ed. Antony Flew (Buffalo: Prometheus, 1987).

adequate must make provision. For that second clause expresses a contrary-to-fact conditional: “*if the first object had not been, the second never had existed.*”

This conclusion obviously cannot be deduced from any non-nomological generalization stating only, as a matter of unexplained and perhaps altogether unrelated brute fact, that all objects of the first kind always have been, are, and will be followed by objects of the second kind. All causal and indeed all nomological propositions, on the other hand, must sustain such inferences. If, for instance, you maintain that the cause of the trouble is a lack of fuel in the tank, this entails that—all other things being equal—had there been fuel in the tank then the machine would have operated. The defining difference between a non-nomological, brute-fact generalization and a nomological asserting a putative causal connection or stating a supposed law of nature precisely is that the one cannot while the other must sustain contrary-to-fact implications.

4. How to Legitimate the Unrecognized Ideas

Hume’s official account, therefore, cannot be defended as an explication of what we are actually saying when we assert nomological propositions. The truth is that we never shall learn how to legitimate the logically connected concepts of factual necessity, factual impossibility, counterfactual conditionality, and causal connection so long as—as devoted Cartesians—we confine our attention to series of purely private impressions impinging upon some inert, solitary, incorporeal soul. It is, Hume has surely shown, impossible either to derive the ideas of causal necessity or causal connection from or to legitimate those ideas by reference to inactive, strictly subjective, purely observational experience of any kind of constant conjunctions.

(a) The origin of or at least the validation for our causal concepts, the grounds upon which our causal knowledge has to be based, lie instead in our abundant and ever repeated experience of activity as creatures of flesh and blood operating in a mind-independent world: experience, that is, of trying to push or to pull things about, and of succeeding in pushing or pulling some but not others; experience of wondering what would happen if, of experimenting, and thus of discovering through experiment what in truth does happen when; and so on, and on and on. To our knowledge of causal, and indeed of all other nomological propositions, we may apply the last words of an epitaph

for one of Stalin's many murdered colleagues, S.M. Kirov: "Only in constant action was his constant certainty found."²⁴

It is thus, surely, that as agents we acquire, apply, and validate the idea of causation and its component notions of factual necessity and factual impossibility? "Component" is the word, since causing is making something happen, and since, in this sense of the word "cause," making something happen is bringing it about that its happening is practically necessary while its not happening is practically impossible. There are also and obviously close logical connections among these key notions and those of causal connection and counterfactual conditionality. For it is the physical impossibility of the occurrence of a so-and-so without the subsequent occurrence of a such-and-such—the physical necessity of that subsequent occurrence—that warrants the immediate counterfactual inference "If there were to have been a so-and-so (which in fact there was not), then there would have been a such-and-such." And what is causal connection if it is not the subsistence of such related factual necessities and factual impossibilities?

(b) In both his treatments Hume lets slip hints that, after all, there really is something more to causation as a philosophical relation than regular succession. We have already given a lot of attention to one of these, the casual addition to the definition in the first *Enquiry*. But there are other, more direct hints of the crucial importance of actual agency. Hume himself, however, makes nothing of them. For instance, at one point in the *Treatise* he writes: "We have no other notion of cause and effect, but that of certain objects, which have been always conjoin'd together, and which in all past instances *have been found inseparable*."²⁵ But how, he ought to have asked himself, has this been found if not through repeated but always unsuccessful efforts to disrupt the correlation?

Here, as in his account of the origins of our beliefs about the external world, Hume sometimes forgets his Cartesian presuppositions, though the offences are certainly more flagrant and more frequent there. He must not, however, be reproached harshly on this

²⁴. The poem from which this line is quoted was published in P. Sloan, ed., *John Cornford: A Memoir* (London: Cape, 1938), 68. It is one of the many merits of John Mackie's *The Cement of the Universe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974) to emphasize the crucial importance of "our experience of our own active interventions in the world" (56). Compare also the complaint in my "Could an Effect Precede Its Cause?" that Hume's was "a paralytic's-eye view of causality."

²⁵. I.iii.6, 93; emphasis added and subtracted.

account. For all those, and they have been many, who have accepted those wildly unrealistic yet vastly seductive sceptical presuppositions have found it practically impossible to maintain them consistently. Berkeley, for instance, tries to be a phenomenalist about his study table. He nevertheless continues brazenly to assume what he elsewhere so famously and so brilliantly denies, that there is indeed a mind-independent world, with objects occupying and moving between positions in that world: “The table I write on I say exists; that is, I see and feel it: and if I were out of my study I should say it existed; meaning thereby that if I were in my study I might perceive it.”²⁶

(c) Credit, however, where credit is due; and much too rarely given. Berkeley and others are often quite rightly reproached for insisting that it is agents alone that can be causes. (Berkeley, of course, also believed that agents are all and only incorporeal spiritual substances.²⁷) But both Berkeley and those others are much too rarely credited, as they surely should be, with the authentic insight that human agency is and must be our paradigm case; albeit a paradigm that permits extension to embrace all manner of causes that are not agents. It must be. For how could your perfectly pure observer—an inert, incorporeal subject of exclusively private experience, a creature necessarily incapable of any action, either physical or mental—how could such a wretch acquire the crucial concepts?

5. The Idea or, Rather, the Ideas of Power

So much for a first approach to the problem of elucidating that element or those elements in the established meanings both of “cause” and of “law of nature” that cannot be compassed by any purely Humean story. A second takes off from one throw-away, single-sentence paragraph: “The distinction, which we often make betwixt *power* and the *exercise* of it, is equally without foundation.”²⁸

(a) Although Hume does have more to say about power in both the *Treatise* and the first *Enquiry*, he never explicates this particular

²⁶. *The Principles of Human Knowledge*, in vol. 1 of *Works*, ed. A.C. Fraser (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901), 259. Also compare Fraser Cowley’s much too rarely commended *A Critique of British Empiricism* (London: Macmillan/New York: St. Martins, 1968), *passim*.

²⁷. See, for instance, *Principles*, 105–8; or the letter to Johnson dated November 25, 1729.

²⁸. I.iii.14, 171.

enigmatic apophthegm. He insists “that the terms of *efficacy, agency, power, force, energy, necessity, connexion, and productive quality*, are all nearly synonymous; and therefore ‘tis an absurdity to employ any of them in defining the rest.”²⁹ On the two occasions when the subject of power is directly addressed there are, however, significant footnote references to the great chapter “Of Power” in Locke’s *Essay*. (Such precise references are as rare in Hume as they are in other writers of his century.)

Let us attend here to the later treatment, in the first *Enquiry*. This is fuller and better than the earlier. It is, nevertheless, vitiated by Hume’s refusal to entertain the thought that there might besides the logical be a second and equally legitimate idea of necessity. This refusal is best as well as most charitably understood if seen to be generated by his overriding concern to safeguard his all-destroying insight that “if we reason *a priori*, anything may appear able to produce anything.”

There is some modest significance in the fact that the whole section is entitled not “Of Necessary Connexion” but “Of *the* Idea of Necessary Connexion” (italics, of course, supplied). Consistent with this prejudicial title, Hume always continues to write “*the* idea of power or necessary connexion,” and so on. He speaks first for Locke: “It may be said, that we are every moment conscious of internal power; while we feel, that, by the simple command of our will, we can move the organs of our body, or direct the faculties of our mind.”³⁰ The nub of Hume’s objection is put in the single sentence: “This influence, we may observe, is a fact, which, like all other natural events, can be known only by experience, and can never be foreseen from any apparent energy or power in the cause, which connects it with the effect, and renders the one an infallible consequence of the other.”³¹

Perfectly true, we may in our turn observe, yet altogether irrelevant. To Hume all this appears germane only because, apparently, he never thinks to assess Locke’s suggestion as being about, first, the origin of concepts incorporating another notion of necessity, and then, the sort of warrant we may have for believing propositions involving such concepts. Thus it is, though quite correct, entirely beside the point to insist that we can learn only through

²⁹. Ibid., 157.

³⁰. *Enquiry* VII.i, 64.

³¹. Ibid., 64–65.

experience, and not from any insight into logical necessities, what is and is not subject to our wills. The facts, too, about what if any physical (or contingent) necessities obtain, and where, are of course contingent facts, not logically necessary truths. Nor is there any question but that, if we are to know any facts of this kind, our knowledge has to be grounded in experience. But, if once we become willing to employ the everyday instead of the philosophers' concept of experience, and ready to admit another idea of necessary connexion besides the logical, then everything here will be seen to be exactly as it should be, and as constituting no threat whatsoever to Hume's master insight.

(b) Although neither Locke nor Hume explicitly distinguished two senses of "power," Locke was in fact concerned with power solely in the sense in which it can be predicated only of people—or of such putative, quasi-personal beings as the theist God, the Olympian gods, archangels, angels, devils, and other assorted disembodied or ever-bodiless spirits. Let us, therefore, attach to power in this first sense the label "power (personal)." It was, presumably, power of this personal sort that Hume was darkly denying when he repudiated "the distinction, which we often make betwixt *power* and the *exercise* of it."

In another sense, which is the only sense in which the word can be applied to inanimate objects and to most of animate nature, a power simply is a disposition to behave in such and such a way, given that such and such preconditions are satisfied. Thus, we might say that the "nuclear device" dropped at Nagasaki possessed an explosive power equivalent to that of so many tons of TNT, or that full-weight nylon climbing rope has a breaking strain of (a power to hold up to) forty-five hundred pounds. Let us label this second sort of power "power (physical)." A power (personal) is an ability at will either to do or to abstain from doing whatever the act may be. Thus, we might say that in his heyday Stalin had the power of life and death over every subject of the Soviet empire, or that a fertile pair of persons of opposite sexes have the power to start a baby. These powers are, in a word, the things that people who possess the power to do them can do or refrain from doing, as they choose.

The enormous human interest and importance of this distinction comes out very clearly when we notice that, on its first publication in 1798, in the original form now best described as the *First Essay*, much of the compelling force and most of the more pessimistic implications of *An Essay on the Principle of Population* derived from its treating this principle of population in humankind as if it were a power (physical). This mistake Malthus corrected by introducing his

peculiarly restricted notion of moral restraint into the greatly revised and expanded version of 1802, now best distinguished as the *Second Essay*. By contrast, Darwin seized upon both the difference and its importance for distinguishing humans from the brutes immediately and without hesitation. Thus, in *The Origin of Species* he argues that “a struggle for existence inevitably follows from the high rate at which all organic beings tend to increase . . . there must in every case be a struggle for existence.” This is “the doctrine of Malthus applied with manifold force to the whole animal and vegetable kingdom; *for in this case there can be no artificial increase of food and no prudential restraint from marriage.*”³²

6. Hume’s Critique of Locke Revisited

In three characteristically vivid passages in the same great chapter, Locke not only explains both what we have distinguished as the idea of power (personal) and the contrasting concepts of physical necessity and physical impossibility, but also demonstrates that there can be no question at all but that all these ideas have abundant application. Since it was this chapter that Hume had most prominently in mind when he rejected the ideas both of personal power and of physical necessity, it becomes peculiarly apposite to be using here materials drawn from that chapter in order to bring out these truths, and some of their important and very fundamental implications.

(a) So let us consider three short passages from that chapter. It is regrettable that in the third Locke mistakes it that he is explaining what is meant not by “an agent” but by “a free agent.” The first runs:

This at least I think evident, That we find in our selves a Power to begin or forbear, continue or end several actions of our minds, and motions of our Bodies. . . . This *Power* . . . thus to order the consideration of any *Idea*, or the forbearing to consider it; or to prefer the motion of any part of the body to its rest, and *vice versa* in any particular instance is that which we call the *Will*.³³

The second runs:

³². Ed. J.B. Burrow (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), 116–17 (emphasis added). The brutes are all animals other than the members of our own species. For a fuller account of the relations and lack of relations between the theories of Malthus and Darwin, compare my *Darwinian Evolution* (London: Granada Paladin, 1984).

³³. *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. P.H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), II.xxi.5, 236.

Every one, I think, finds in himself a *Power* to begin or forbear, continue or put an end to several Actions in himself. From the consideration of the extent of this power over the actions of the Man, which everyone finds in himself, arise the Ideas of *Liberty* and *Necessity*.³⁴

The third, in which the Latin translates as “St. Vitus’s dance,” reads:

We have instances enough, and often more than enough, in our own Bodies. A Man’s Heart beats, and the Blood circulates, which ‘tis not in his Power . . . to stop; and therefore in respect of these Motions, where rest depends not on his choice . . . he is not a *free Agent*. Convulsive Motions agitate his Legs, so that though he *wills* it never so much, he cannot . . . stop their motion (as in that odd Disease called *chorea Sancti Viti*), but he is perpetually dancing: He is . . . under as much Necessity of moving as a Stone that falls or a Tennis-ball struck with a Racket.³⁵

(b) With the reminders of these three passages before us we are ready to develop ostensive definitions of two kinds of bodily movements. Going deliberately with rather than against the grain of modern English usage, let those which can be either initiated or quashed at will be labelled “movings” and those which cannot “motions.” It is obvious that there are plenty of marginal cases. Nevertheless, so long as there are—as there are—far, far more that fall unequivocally upon one side or the other, we must resolutely and stubbornly refuse to be prevented from labouring this absolutely fundamental and decisive distinction by any such diversionary appeals to the existence of marginal cases.

Contemplation of these and similar passages in Locke should be sufficient to show, first, that we all of us have the most direct and the most inexpugnably certain experience not only of both factual necessity and factual impossibility, but also, on some occasions, of being able to do other than we do do, and on other occasions, of being unable to behave in any way other than as we are behaving.

So it is in terms of our fundamental distinction between movings and motions that we establish and explicate the even more fundamental concept of action. An agent is a creature that, precisely and only insofar as it is an agent, can and cannot but make choices:

³⁴. *Ibid.*, II.xxi.7, 237.

³⁵. *Ibid.*, II.xxi.11, 239.

choices between alternative courses of action both or all of which are open; real choices, notwithstanding that sometimes by choosing one or even any of these open alternatives the agent will incur formidable costs. Agents, too, qua agents—it is the price of privilege—inescapably must choose, and can in no way avoid choosing, one of the two or more options that on particular occasions are open and available. For the nerve of the distinction between the movements involved in an action and those which constitute no more than items or partial components of necessitated behaviour just is that such behaviour is necessitated, whereas the senses of actions not merely are not, but necessarily cannot be.

(c) Once we are seized of these insights, we should be ready to recognize that there is no way in which creatures neither enjoying nor suffering experiences of these two contrasting kinds could acquire for themselves, or explicate to others, any of the corresponding notions. The experiences in question, to repeat, are, on the one hand, those of confronting, that is to say experiencing, factual necessities and factual impossibilities; and on the other hand, those of agents able and having to choose between acting in one way or another, and not being necessitated to behave in this way rather than that.

Now, if none of the key and contrasting notions could be explained, acquired, or understood by creatures neither enjoying nor suffering such experiences, then that fact must constitute an objection of overwhelming and decisive force against any doctrine of universal, ineluctably necessitating, determinism.

Those still inclined to doubt this contention have a challenge to face. They must excogitate their own alternative accounts of how all these key notions, including the perhaps so far not sufficiently emphasized key notion of counterfactual conditionality, might be explained, acquired, and understood by creatures who are not agents and who do not have such experiences. Maybe this challenge can, after all, be met. Maybe. But until and unless it is met, and met convincingly, the prudent philosopher is bound to adopt the archetypical attitude of the man from Missouri. Notoriously, if his reluctance to believe is to be overcome, he has to be shown. And that prudent philosopher's conviction that these things just cannot be shown should be strengthened by considering that and why Hume failed to locate any suitable sort of parent experiences ("impressions") by reference to which the concepts ("ideas") of physical necessity and physical impossibility could have been legitimated.

7. Theological Applications?

Since the present paper took off from Penelhum's "Divine Necessity," it is perhaps appropriate for it to end, as that did, with a few tentative and sketchy remarks about possible theological applications of notions of factual necessity and factual impossibility.

(a) In concluding that paper, Penelhum asserted, "If there is a factually necessary being, then this fact, though the most important fact there is, could not be proved" (186). But now, if "factual necessity" and "factual impossibility" are being construed as they have been in the above account of the nature of laws of nature, then it is not clear either why the fact of the existence of something that it is not in fact possible to destroy is "the most important fact there is," or why it is thought that the existence of such a being "could not be proved."

Presumably, Penelhum was asking himself what, if anything, could be made of the suggestion that the God of theism is not a logically but a factually necessary being. In that case, given the same assumptions about the interpretation of the expressions "factual necessity" and "factual impossibility," it becomes clear both why the fact of the existence of this being would be the most important fact there is, and why that fact, if it were a fact, could not be proved. The fact would be the most important fact there is because it would then be the fact of the existence of the theist God. The factual necessity of that God could not be proved because such a proof would establish that the existence of this being was a natural necessity; and, as by definition Creator, that God must impose and sustain rather than itself be a product of the laws of nature.

A marginally more promising tactic for the natural theologian is to take the subsistence of factual necessities and factual impossibilities as a premise. For "nomic laws" are certainly far stronger, and hence capable of warranting richer conclusions, than mere generalizations. It is, surely, more remarkable, and therefore ultimately perhaps more significant, that the universe is an universe of natural law than had it been an universe of mere material implication regularity? It was, furthermore, only his "giving a new definition of necessity"³⁶—one involving not necessity at all, but merely regularity—that enabled Hume's "reconciling project" with re-

³⁶. This phrase is in the *Abstract* of the Selby-Bigge/Nidditch *Treatise*, 31.

gard to what he rated “the most contentious question, of metaphysics, the most contentious science” to go through at the trot.³⁷

(b) In the second part of the same section of the first *Enquiry*—in order to show that, as “the mediate cause of all the actions of men,” the deity must be “the author of sin and moral turpitude”³⁸—Hume appears unwittingly to reintroduce a, or rather the, notion of agency, of making something happen.³⁹ To save the reconciling project, if not by the same token the credit of the Creator, we need to develop a distinction broached by Hume in a work not usually rated philosophical. For in the essay “Of National Characters” he wrote: “By *moral* causes, I mean all circumstances which are fitted to work on the mind as motives or reasons. . . . By *physical* causes I mean those qualities of the air and climate, which are supposed to work insensibly on the temper, by altering the tone and habit of the body.”⁴⁰

Hume does not, however, even here anticipate Weber and his successors by arguing that explanations in terms of these two different kinds of cause are of two irreducibly different logical types; much less go on to argue that the differences between these two concepts of cause, and between the proper occasions for their application, provide the grounds for making a radical division between the physical and the moral (or human) sciences. For, unfortunately, Hume has disqualified himself from doing this by his repudiation of physical necessity.

What needs to be done is to add this as a second differentiating principle to the original distinction between physical and moral causes. For we have to recognize that there is an absolutely fundamental difference between, on the one hand, ensuring that some person will act in one particular way by providing him or her with some overwhelmingly strong reason so to do, and on the other hand, making some purely physical phenomenon happen by bringing about the causally sufficient conditions of its occurrence. That absolutely fundamental difference is that, whereas such sufficient physical causes necessarily necessitate the occurrence of their effects, corres-

³⁷. *Enquiry* VIII.i, 95.

³⁸. *Enquiry* VIII.ii, 103.

³⁹. See, for instance, Max Black, “Making Something Happen,” in *Determinism and Freedom in the Age of Modern Science*, ed. S. Hook (New York: New York University Press, 1958).

⁴⁰. *Essays, Moral Political and Literary*, ed. E.F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1985), 198.

pondingly sufficient moral causes do not. If, for instance, I convey to you some splendid news—news that, if you decided to celebrate, you and everyone else would point to as the cause of your celebrating—then I do not by so doing ensure that you must, willy-nilly, behave in a celebratory way.

How a Sceptic May Live Scepticism

David Fate Norton

I

The charge that the sceptic cannot consistently live scepticism dates from ancient times. Sextus Empiricus, apparently following the lead of Arcesilaus, perhaps even that of Pyrrho himself, provides a defense against the charge. The Pyrrhonists, the only true sceptics in Sextus's view, do not, he points out, doubt appearances. Pyrrhonists accept that the honey now tastes sweet or that the oar now appears bent; they engage in doubt leading to *epoché*, or suspension of belief, only about non-evident things. As Sextus puts it, "We do not deny those things which, in accordance with the passivity of our sense-impressions, lead us involuntarily to give our assent to them, and these are appearances. . . . Hence not the appearance is questioned, but that which is predicated of the appearance." The predications in question concern, of course, the non-evident things about which the Pyrrhonist makes no assertions, a point Sextus later underscores by saying, "One must also remember that, as for dogmatic assertions about the non-evident, we neither affirm nor deny them."¹

David Hume, himself a sceptic of some repute, appears to ignore the distinction that Sextus has drawn. That is, notwithstanding Sextus's attempt to distinguish between what sceptics of his sort do and do not doubt, an attempt, in effect, to show that Pyrrhonists could consistently live their scepticism, Hume insists that Pyrrhonism is infected by "excessive principles of scepticism" that make it unlivable. Stoics or Epicureans, he writes, maintain principles that have a durable and significant effect on conduct. Pyrrhonists, in contrast, adopt a position that cannot "have any constant influence on the mind." A Pyrrhonist "may throw himself or

1. *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, I.10, I.20, quoted from *Sextus Empiricus: Selections from the Major Writings on Scepticism, Man and God*, ed. P. P. Haillie, trans. S. G. Etheridge (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1985), 38, 81.

others into a momentary amazement and confusion,” but the most trivial events “will put to flight all his doubts and scruples, and leave him the same, in every point of action and speculation, with the philosophers of every other sect, or with those who never concerned themselves in any philosophical researches.” And did Pyrrhonism have any such influence, it would not be a beneficial one. Were the Pyrrhonists’ “principles universally and steadily to prevail,” discourse, action, “all human life” would come to an end. Fortunately, so terrible an outcome is not to be expected: “Nature is always too strong for principle.”²

I am interested here in two criticisms that have been lodged against Hume, and from which I believe he can be defended. The first of these is the charge, made by Myles Burnyeat, that Hume in his criticism of the Pyrrhonists assumes “without argument that it is impossible to live without reason and belief.”³ Burnyeat amplifies his objection by showing that the Pyrrhonists drew a clear distinction between accepting appearances, a passive and undogmatic response, and belief, a very different kind of response that entails or is constituted by the making of assertions about non-evident things. Having supposed this distinction a sound one, the Pyrrhonists had reasonable grounds for supposing that they could live without belief. That is, they could live without making assertions that go beyond the acceptance of the experience of the moment.

Hume’s claim that the Pyrrhonist cannot refrain from believing, and hence that Pyrrhonian scepticism is unlivable, is also challenged by Terence Penelhum. Hume’s objection fails, Penelhum suggests, because “the obvious plausibility” of his “insistence that we cannot keep up philosophical doubts all the time, does not show that no one can live the Skeptic way.” Doubt can be said to be “sustained and protracted” in a less literal way than that demanded by Hume: “We can . . . say that someone who follows a way of thought in which he regularly extinguishes his inclinations to commitment by the examination of arguments for and against each dogmatic position, can be said to live his Skepticism in spite of his occasional lapses into commitment in the marketplace.” The sceptic may from time to time find

². David Hume, *Enquiries concerning Human Understanding and concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge and P.H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 158, 160 (hereafter cited as *ECHU*).

³. “Can the Sceptic Live His Scepticism?”, in *Doubt and Dogmatism*, ed. M. Scholfield, M. Burnyeat, and J. Barnes (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 23.

himself believing what he has undertaken to doubt, but “his overall performance can entitle him to say he does not believe really. For most of the time the suspense he engenders in the study stays with him in the marketplace, so that he conforms with his fellows undogmatically. What counts in judging any lapses is the fact that he is following a way of life which enables him to *contend* with them.”⁴

Penelhum goes on to argue that Hume himself fails to provide us with a form of scepticism that can be consistently lived in anything other than this “on-again-off-again” manner. Certainly, the scepticism of Hume’s *Treatise* is of just this intermittent nature; the sceptic of the *Treatise* is only a part-time sceptic who cannot always live his doubts. Consequently his scepticism is, by Hume’s own standard, unlivable. And, according to Penelhum, the “mitigated scepticism” of *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* is also inconsistent, but in another way: Hume’s positivist recommendation requires of some of us (those of a certain speculative disposition) what it does not need to require of others, namely, that we limit the scope of our enquiries to “the reflections of common life.” Such a requirement is unjustified and dogmatic; the presuppositions underlying common life “are as incapable of rational justification as the pretensions of metaphysics” or the beliefs of religion. Hume has shown that none of our matter-of-fact beliefs (our beliefs in particular causal connections, for example) is adequately supported by the evidence of reason or the senses. But if none of our matter-of-fact beliefs is a justified belief to which we are committed because of the force of the available evidence, on what grounds would the mitigated sceptic confine our reflections to such matters of fact? Why should not those disposed to do so also dabble in the subjects (“divinity or school metaphysics,” for example) that Hume proscribes? One could consistently follow Hume’s positivist program, but in doing so one would fail to be consistently sceptical and would, consequently, fail to live one’s scepticism.⁵

These two objections are logically distinct, but they have much in common philosophically. They may be met, I believe, by attention to the same general topic, namely, Hume’s account of belief and doubt as it bears on his critique of Pyrrhonism and on his own positive (but not positivist) account of scepticism. In focusing on this account, we

⁴. Penelhum, *God and Skepticism* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1983), 36.

⁵. *Ibid.*, 126–27. Penelhum also considers Hume’s answer to this criticism, but finds that answer unsatisfactory.

will see that Hume argued that belief and assertion, even beliefs in and assertions about things non-evident, are beyond the direct control of humans and hence cannot be suspended. Consequently, it seemed to him only reasonable to conclude that the Pyrrhonian program is in fact untenable. But Hume went on to outline an alternative form of scepticism. This form of scepticism may be open to other criticisms, but it is not, I submit, susceptible to the charge of being inconsistent in such a way as to be unlivable.

II

At the beginning of Section V of the *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* Hume expresses his admiration for “the Academic or Sceptical philosophy.” This species of philosophy has, he says, a clear advantage over all other kinds: by its very nature it protects those who adopt it from the excesses that are characteristic of alternative forms of philosophy. The academic sceptic, noting the dangers of hasty and dogmatic judgement, emphasizes continually the advantages of “doubt and suspense of judgment . . . of confining to very narrow bounds the enquiries of the understanding, and of renouncing all speculations which lie not within the limits of common life and practice.” In this way these sceptics avoid the arrogance, pretension, and credulity of the dogmatists, but their philosophy, because it “gains few partizans” while yet “opposing so many vices and follies,” is itself left vulnerable to enemies who attack it as “libertine, profane, and irreligious” (*ECHU*, 41).

I propose to read Section XII of the *Enquiry* as Hume’s defence of the academic philosophy, and as a statement of his mature version of scepticism. Hume begins this defence by pointing out that the critics of scepticism are, very much like some critics of atheism, confused. They cannot decide whether to attack scepticism as harmful and dangerous or to dismiss it as too ridiculous and untenable to be believed. The obvious thing to do, then, is to try to determine “What is meant by a sceptic? And how far it is possible to push these philosophical principles of doubt and uncertainty?” (*ECHU*, 149)

Hume answers the first of his questions by means of a lengthy catalogue-cum-discussion of the types or “species” of scepticism. In the course of this discussion there are explicit references to *antecedent* and to *consequent* scepticism; the former has both a *Cartesian* and a *moderate* form. There are equally explicit references to *academic*, to *Pyrrhonian*, and to *mitigated* scepticism, while some sceptical arguments are denominated *popular* and others

philosophical. “Sceptic,” it seems, means many things to many people, and despite the comprehensiveness of Hume’s discussion, it is difficult to say just how many species of scepticism he has identified. The difficulty arises from the fact that the several categories overlap. Fortunately, deciding precisely how many distinct species of scepticism there are (or how many Hume supposes there are) is not here of great relevance. But the answer he gives to his second question (“And how far it is possible to push these philosophical principles of doubt and uncertainty?”) is germane and important. From the discussion found in Section XII one can readily conclude that there is nothing, no substantive matter and no faculty of mind, that some sceptic has not doubted or tried to doubt. Hume, however, has countered this popular view of the sceptic as one who doubts anything and everything by pointing out that some “principles of doubt and uncertainty” are untenable or ineffective. Descartes’s version of antecedent scepticism, for example, counsels an impossible doubt (doubt everything at once, and continue to do so until a foundation of knowledge is found), which, once entered into, could not be escaped. The familiar arguments (those regarding sense variations) of certain consequent sceptics are too trite to merit attention. The more profound consequent sceptic can adduce insurmountable arguments showing us that we know nothing about the nature of external objects, and even that there may be no such objects; but these sceptical arguments, although they cannot be answered, produce no conviction, and are of only momentary effect and no durable good. Similarly, the doubts the Pyrrhonians direct at the objects of common life are as evanescent as smoke and, fortunately for us, of no effect as far as our belief in those objects is concerned. And even those sceptics of whom Hume speaks positively are warned: every sceptic must recognize that even her most significant doubts are the product of the very faculties she has criticized as weak and unreliable.

And yet Hume continues to recommend scepticism and doubt. The academic sceptics, who themselves emphasize the advantages of “doubt and suspense of judgment,” are presented as model philosophers. The “*academical* philosophy,” when it has modified the undisciplined doubts of Pyrrhonism, may prove to be both “durable and useful” (*ECHU*, 161). There is a degree of doubt that ought to be standard equipment for every enquirer. How are we to reconcile these remarks, how fit the alternating recommendations and criticisms into a coherent defense of scepticism? We can do this by placing Hume’s

distinctions between *kinds of doubt* in the wider context of two contrasting accounts of doubt and belief.

The two accounts are those of Descartes's *Meditations* and Hume's own.⁶ Descartes, apparently concerned about the state of learning in general and about the reliability of his own beliefs, hit upon his now famous method of doubt. Consider any belief, any claim whatsoever, Descartes said. Is it conceivable that this belief could be false? If not, if the belief is indubitable, it may be accepted as true. But if the belief could be false, it is to be taken to be false. "Anything which admits of the slightest doubt," says Descartes, "I will set aside just as if I had found it to be wholly false."⁷ It was in this manner that Descartes considered his beliefs about the existence and nature of physical objects, mathematical propositions, and even God. About each such kind of belief he finds some possible flaw, some reason to think that kind of belief could be false, and so, exercising his will, he treats all beliefs of these several kinds as false.

In one of his explanations of his enterprise, Descartes compares his method with the actions of a person who is concerned that his entire basket of apples may spoil because some of his apples are already rotten. It is perfectly understandable that such a person would tip all the apples out of the basket, so that he could inspect each in turn and restore only sound apples to the basket.⁸ In fact, Descartes's method is more radical than this comparison suggests. He is more nearly like a person who, concerned about the state of his apples, discards not merely those that are spoiled, but also those that could spoil. Of course, Descartes has also generalized his procedure: he does not have to inspect each belief individually because he applies his method of doubt to the very faculties underlying all belief—to the senses, to reason, and to consciousness itself. Having thus made matters doubly

⁶. I here focus on certain noticeable features of the discussion of doubt and belief found in the *Meditations* that I suppose Hume himself would have noticed during his own reading of that work. A scholarly recapitulation of Descartes on doubt and belief might well reveal that the sharply defined positions of the *Meditations* are later modified or contradicted. I have previously attempted a similar comparison of Descartes and Hume, with different results, in my *David Hume: Common-Sense Moralism, Sceptical Metaphysician* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 249–55.

⁷. *Meditations on First Philosophy*, in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, 2 vols., trans. J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, and D. Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 2:16.

⁸. *Seventh Set of Objections and Replies*, in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, 2:324.

easier (he need find only one doubtful belief of each type), he is poised to cast off every belief and every faculty. It is as if the apple inspector, having noticed that some coloured fruit of determinate shape has spoiled, decided to discard all his apples because they too, being coloured fruit of a determinate shape, could spoil.

Descartes's antecedent scepticism, then, takes any belief that is not perfectly indubitable to be false.⁹ This suggests that Descartes here supposes that belief and doubt are in one important sense incompatible, a suggestion confirmed by his account of error. Many people hold common-sense beliefs that Descartes takes to be false (many people believe, for example, that apples are really coloured, whereas Descartes argues that colour is not a quality of apples themselves), but, although we owe our existence and our faculties to God, he insists that God is not to be blamed for the fact that these erroneous beliefs are held. God is not responsible for our errors, no matter how natural these may seem, because he has given us a faculty of *judgement* or *understanding*, a faculty by which we may control the *will*, and it is this latter faculty that is immediately responsible for our beliefs. Error arises only because we allow the will to outrun this faculty of judgement and to cause us to believe before truth has been established. If we put our minds (literally, our judgements) to it we can avoid believing anything that can be doubted, anything that we do not yet know to be true.¹⁰

The sense in which Descartes suggests that belief and doubt are incompatible is now clear. On the account outlined, it is clearly not possible for someone to doubt something and at the same time to claim that she cannot avoid believing (or believing in) that same thing. On this account of the matter, to say that one *doubts p* is just to say that one *disbelieves p*, or that, either involuntarily or voluntarily, one has come to the conclusion that *p* is false. On the other hand, when one's understanding has supplied one with a clear and distinct idea of something, one then has justification for ceasing to doubt and withhold assent, for allowing oneself to believe about this particular matter. In short, Descartes suggests that individuals can exercise complete control over any belief that is not founded on perfect knowl-

⁹. This is surely Hume's understanding of the matter, as may be seen from his remarks in *ECHU* XII.i.

¹⁰. See Meditation 4 for Descartes's account of this matter. Descartes (in translation) refers to the faculty that the will outruns as the *faculty of judgement*, *faculty of true judgement*, *faculty of knowledge*, *faculty of understanding*, and *power of understanding*.

edge itself. Consequently, he can argue that an individual should permit belief only when he or she has such knowledge: “If, however, I simply refrain from making a judgment in cases where I do not perceive the truth with sufficient clarity and distinctness, then it is clear that I am behaving correctly and avoiding error.” To believe in the absence of knowledge is to permit the relatively powerful will to overrun the weaker understanding, and to lay oneself open to the possibility of error. It is also in itself blameworthy. Even if, lacking knowledge, I by chance “arrive at the truth . . . I shall still be at fault since it is clear by the natural light that the perception of the intellect should always precede the determination of the will.”¹¹

Two further and closely related features of this account are relevant here. According to the *Meditations* there can never be, once one has attained grounds for legitimate belief, any need to continue to doubt. If the precondition of responsible belief has been met, there can be no further grounds for withholding assent or for any form of restraint. Belief is justified only when knowledge is perfect, but knowledge can be perfect, and when it is one need not restrain one’s commitment. Neither hesitation nor even modesty is required. Moreover, once one does have knowledge of any particular matter, further doubt about that matter is in fact impossible. That which is known is, according to Descartes, indubitable. Knowledge not only makes doubt unnecessary, but also makes it impossible.¹²

Hume’s account of these matters is significantly different. For one thing, he maintains that belief is at least proximately involuntary: belief arises as a consequence of what Hume characterizes as natural causes, and not as the result of an act of the will. We can wilfully join or separate ideas (the units of thought, as it were), and these wilful acts may *indirectly* influence our beliefs, but the proximate and direct causes of beliefs are outside our immediate control. “Nothing is more free than the imagination of man,” he writes, and though the imagination cannot of itself produce entirely new ideas, it has an “unlimited power of mixing, compounding, separating, and dividing” ideas and “can feign a train of events, with all the appearance of reality . . . that belongs to any historical fact, which it believes with the

¹¹. *Meditations*, in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, 2:41.

¹². “Whatever is revealed to me by the natural light—for example that from the fact that I am doubting it follows that I exist, and so on—cannot in any way be open to doubt” (*ibid.*, 2:27).

greatest certainty.”¹³ There is, however, an essential difference between even the most credible imagined idea or train of ideas and a belief. Nor does this difference depend on some distinctive idea that, when added to a fiction, causes the resulting mixture to command our assent. If that were the case, we could believe at will; if that were the case, we could believe simply by adding this distinctive idea to any other idea that came to mind. On the contrary, the difference between fictional conceptions not believed, and any conception that is believed and that “commands our assent,” depends on

some sentiment or feeling, which is annexed to the latter, not to the former, and which depends not on the will, nor can be commanded at pleasure. *It must be excited by nature, like all other sentiments; and must arise from the particular situation, in which the mind is placed at any particular juncture.* Whenever any object is presented to the memory or senses, it immediately, by the force of custom, carries the imagination to conceive that object, which is usually conjoined to it; and this conception is attended with a feeling or sentiment, different from the loose reveries of the fancy. In this consists the whole nature of belief.¹⁴

Hume is also content that we should believe on grounds other than the one singled out in the *Meditations*, namely, the possession of indubitable knowledge. Indeed, it is an obvious implication of the account of belief just sketched that we shall have a great many unjustified beliefs. We simply cannot respect a philosopher’s injunction that we refrain from believing until we have the perfect illumination pro-

¹³ *ECHU*, 47. In the *Treatise*, Hume discusses two very different kinds of relation. There are natural relations, or instances of one idea (or perception) “naturally” introducing another, and philosophical relations, or instances of “the arbitrary union of two ideas in the fancy” whenever “we may think proper to compare them.” (*A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge and P.H. Nidditch [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978], 13). The freedom of the imagination spoken of in the *Enquiry* is the freedom to consider a wide range of philosophical relations and their negations. Although Hume does not seem explicitly to have said so, he apparently supposes that the philosophical doubt that he recommends is made possible by the freedom of our imagination, and is in fact constituted by some particular forms that the exercise of this freedom may take.

¹⁴ *ECHU*, 47–48, emphasis added. Hume’s discussion of belief in the *Enquiry*, and particularly that found in Section V (a portion of which I have just quoted), is focused on the belief that characterizes causal inference, or the transfer of attention from a present impression to an associated idea. His other discussions of belief (in the *Treatise* and the *Abstract*) provide the more generalized account of belief I am sketching. To the best of my knowledge, Hume never suggests that all belief is propositional or involves propositional attitudes.

vided by an infallible natural light. Even many apparently unavoidable beliefs appear to be unjustified. We find it, for example, impossible not to believe that there are independently existing objects or that particular causes will in the future be followed by the same effects that have followed them in the past.¹⁵

In Hume's view, then, there are beliefs that are both unavoidable and unjustified. Consequently, there may also be beliefs that are both unavoidable and false: even the most stubborn or ineradicable, the most *natural*, of our beliefs may be false, although there may be virtually no likelihood of establishing that falsity.¹⁶ The persistent strength—the indubitability—of a belief is of itself not proof, or even evidence, that the belief is true. In short, Hume has driven an unexpected wedge between belief and truth. It is not just that I can doubt the veracity of your beliefs, whatever those may be. According to Hume, I can and in many cases should doubt my own beliefs *even while I am holding those beliefs*.

¹⁵. Hume has often been represented as the philosopher who urged us to disbelieve such commonplace notions as that the sun will rise tomorrow. His general view on such matters appears to be that of the *Enquiry*. Although philosophers should be allowed to investigate why and how experience influences us as it does, “none but a fool or madman will ever pretend to dispute the authority of experience, or to reject that great guide of human life” (*ECHU*, 36). More specifically, Hume discusses sunrises only three times. In the *Treatise* he says, “One wou’d appear ridiculous, who wou’d say, that ‘tis only probable the sun will rise to-morrow, or that all men must dye; tho’ ‘tis plain we have no further assurance of these facts, than what experience affords us,” and he goes on to suggest a distinction between demonstrations, proofs, and probabilities (124). The *Enquiry* makes much the same point: “Mr. Locke divides all arguments into demonstrative and probable. In this view, we must say, that it is only probable all men must die, or that the sun will rise to-morrow. But to conform our language more to common use, we ought to divide arguments into *demonstrations*, *proofs*, and *probabilities*. By proofs meaning such arguments from experience as leave no room for doubt or opposition.” In short, we have a *proof* that the sun will rise tomorrow. See also *Enquiry*, 25–26.

¹⁶. On Hume's view, both the truth and the falsity of important metaphysical claims are beyond our ken. It may be impossible for us to avoid believing in the existence of external objects, but we have no way of proving this belief to be true. Nor do we have grounds for supposing it to be false. “It is a question of fact, whether the perceptions of the senses be produced by external objects, resembling them: How shall this question be determined? By experience surely; as all other questions of a like nature. But here experience is, and must be entirely silent. The mind has never any thing present to it but the perceptions, and cannot possibly reach any experience of their connexion with objects. The supposition of such a connexion is, therefore, without any foundation in reasoning” (*ECHU*, 153). The veil of perceptions is entirely opaque, and leaves us with no grounds for adopting either of the dogmatic options available to us.

These conclusions leave us, however, with some serious questions. Hume argues that belief is fundamentally involuntary. What, then, are we to make of his injunctions to doubt? Is doubt really something we can choose to undertake? How can we doubt beliefs that may be forced upon us against our wills even as we hold those same beliefs?

The answer to these questions lies, ultimately, in Hume's account of the imagination. As we have already seen, Hume ascribes to this faculty the "unlimited power of mixing, compounding, separating, and dividing" ideas. It is this voluntary facility that enables us to doubt as Hume enjoins. Circumstances and custom cause our ideas to be accompanied with that particular feeling called belief, but we nonetheless retain the ability to entertain, at least on occasion, any manner of possibility, including possibilities that are contrary to our expectations and beliefs. Custom and the propensities of the imagination lead us to the conviction that the sun will certainly rise again tomorrow. But that same imagination, in a more reflective mode, can conceive the contrary of this conviction, and even discover that, whatever its psychological force, it is epistemologically suspect. Hume, contradicting the claims of Descartes's *Meditations*, insists that belief is involuntary. Doubt, however, in a form Hume supposes to be both viable and valuable, is voluntary.

This last may seem a surprising possibility. Certainly it has not occurred to a host of philosophers who have undertaken to refute scepticism, *all* scepticism, by pointing out that the sceptic cannot *live* his doubts: sooner rather than later, the argument goes, the counsellor of doubt, the sceptic himself, will find that he cannot maintain his doubt. He will, willy-nilly, jump out of the paths of onrushing vehicles, he will eat the food on the table, he will go out the door and not the window. But those who have claimed to refute the sceptic in this way have not noticed that, in counselling doubt, the sceptic need not be aiming to put us in, so to speak, a particular state of mind (characterized by some form of psychological uncertainty), or to lead us to adopt one particular attitude or disposition (characterized by suspension of belief about such common things as vehicles, tables, and doors). The sceptic may, as Hume certainly did, recommend doubt of a significantly different form—he may recommend what we can call *philosophical* (in contrast to *psychological*) doubt.

The form of doubt that Hume recommends may be understood as an intellectual activity or a philosophical method. When Hume speaks positively about the moderate form of antecedent scepticism, he represents this as a "necessary preparative," a method of enquiry

that calls for us “to begin with clear and self-evident principles, to advance by timorous and sure steps, to review frequently our conclusions, and [to] examine accurately all their consequences.” The “mitigated *scepticism* or *academical* philosophy” he recommends is very similar. It calls for us to use our imaginative freedom or, what in these circumstances comes to the same thing, our critical reason, to challenge beliefs, even those that appear most natural and most cherished. We are to *doubt*: that is, we are to attend to the counter-evidence and counter-arguments; we are to avoid precipitate decisions on the issues before us; we are to take note of the inherent limitations on our faculties; we are to confine our enquiries to those subjects of which we have had, or can yet have, experience. It is not intended, however, that this philosophical doubt should turn us into neurotics forever having bones set because we do not know what to believe about oncoming traffic. Hume himself is clear about this. There is, he says, no danger that *philosophical* doubt “should ever undermine the reasonings of common life, and carry its doubts so far as to destroy all action, as well as speculation. Nature will always maintain her rights, and prevail in the end over any abstract reasoning whatsoever” (*ECHU*, 150, 161, 41).

But, although nature will always prevail over all forms of abstract reasoning, philosophical doubt included, engaging in such doubt is not without beneficial effect. Philosophical doubt is intended only (as if this is not enough) to “inspire” us to “modesty and reserve,” to a diminution of our blind biases in favour of our own views and against those who disagree with us. It accomplishes this valuable goal by indirection. Realizing that virtually nothing will be gained by a direct attack on our ordinary, common-sense views, the Humean seeks rather to alter “the particular situation”—the intellectual conditions—in which the mind finds itself when belief arises. Belief arises naturally and involuntarily as the effect of certain causes or intellectual conditions. Effective and viable scepticism does not seek to arrest this involuntary effect per se. It seeks rather to alter the intellectual *conditions* in which the effect occurs, thus changing the character of the effect. Hume supposes that beliefs may be stronger or weaker, or vary by degree. Voluntary doubt, although it may not be able to extinguish any given belief, may nonetheless prevent that

belief from rising to the height of dogmatic and intolerant certainty. Voluntary doubt can serve to moderate or mitigate belief.¹⁷

Alternatively, we may say that on Hume's account belief is *contextual*. We do not conclude that a pinpoint of light in a darkened sky is a comet and not a star without further information, including the knowledge that there is a difference between stars and comets.¹⁸ Consequently, many individuals, including many relatively expert observers, may, on seeing some such pinpoint of light, defer from concluding that it is a comet and not a star (or a star and not a comet) because, even though they know that there are unmistakable differences between these two astronomical phenomena, they are not in a position to say which it is they are experiencing at this particular time and place. Others, less well informed about the possibilities, may simply assume that the phenomenon is a star. The point is simple: the relatively expert observer recognizes that her faculties and information provide an inadequate basis on which to make a definitive claim about the phenomenon being experienced. This observer has learned, from personal experience or from the experience of others—likely from both—and perhaps even from reading Hume, about our limitations and our proneness to error, and hence is cautious not only in her pronouncements, but even in her very thoughts about the matter.

¹⁷. The ultimate goal of philosophical scepticism is well stated in *A Letter from a Gentleman*: "In Reality, a Philosopher who affects to doubt of the Maxims of *common Reason*, and even of his *Senses*, declares sufficiently that he is not in earnest, and that he intends not to advance an Opinion which he would recommend as Standards of Judgment and Action. All he means by these Scruples is to abate the Pride of *mere human Reasoners*, by showing them, that even with regard to Principles which seem the clearest, and which they are necessitated from the strongest Instincts of Nature to embrace, they are not able to attain a full Consistence and absolute Certainty. *Modesty* then, and *Humility*, with regard to the Operations of our natural Faculties, is the Result of *Scepticism*: not an universal Doubt, which it is impossible for any Man to support, and which the first and most trivial Accident in Life must immediately disconcert and destroy." (*A Letter from a Gentleman to His Friend in Edinburgh: Containing Some Observations on a Specimen of the Principles concerning Religion and Morality*, said to be *maintain'd in a Book lately publish'd intituled, A Treatise of Human Nature, &c* [Edinburgh, 1745], 19. The text cited here is from *HUMETEXT 1.0*, ed. T. L. Beauchamp, D. Fate Norton, and M.A. Stewart [Washington: Georgetown University, 1990]). It must be remembered that the *Letter* was published without Hume's permission by Henry Home (later Lord Kames), and that the text of Hume's original letter may have been altered by Kames.

¹⁸. I here ignore the fact that certain "stars" are actually galaxies, and other such complications.

Whether our observer's belief about the phenomenon she is experiencing has been affected by considerations of exactly the type that constitute philosophical doubt is unimportant. The point is, rather, that Hume saw that we would benefit from the kind of philosophical activity that adds an appreciation of our limitations to the conditions in which belief is formed—that adds an appreciation of the narrow compass of the human understanding and of the fanciful speculations and dogmas that have attended its unrestricted use, and of its history of error even when restricted within its appropriate sphere. Seeing that belief is itself involuntary, Hume does not attempt to lead us, as he supposed the Pyrrhonians had, to a complete suspension of belief. Instead, he attempts to add to the conditions that give rise to belief the salutary and mitigating influence of properly distinguished, philosophical doubts. Philo, often thought to be Hume's spokesman in the *Dialogues*, suggests that scepticism may have a result very much like that just described:

If a man has accustomed himself to sceptical considerations on the uncertainty and narrow limits of reason, he will not entirely forget them when he turns his reflection on other subjects; but in all his philosophical principles and reasoning, I dare not say, in his common conduct, he will be found different from those, who either never formed any opinions in the case, or have entertained sentiments more favourable to human reason.¹⁹

III

I have argued that the fundamental aim of Hume's academical scepticism is not disbelief, but mitigated belief. For just that reason, Humean scepticism is a viable scepticism. To see that this is so, we must consider the manner in which this mitigating scepticism works. This we can do by turning again to the *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*.

After certain preliminaries, Hume's first *Enquiry* settles down to the business of cautioning us about the fundamental limitations of the human understanding, and to challenging philosophical and theological pretension. In Section IV, for example ("Sceptical Doubts concerning the Operations of the Understanding"), Hume shows us that

¹⁹. *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, ed. N.K. Smith (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson, 1947), 134.

neither abstract reasoning nor reasoning from experience can provide a secure or adequate foundation for the apparently universal and essential belief that similar effects will follow from similar causes, and hence that the future will resemble the past. Neither a rationalistic nor an empirical philosophy can provide a foundation for our causal reasonings. He grants, of course, that it is by experience that we come to have what we call “knowledge” of cause and effect, and to this extent he accepts an empiricist account of the matter. But when he goes on to ask a new and difficult question, “*What is the foundation of all conclusions from experience?*” it is clear that empiricism, too, is to undergo sceptical scrutiny. If empiricists “give themselves airs of superior wisdom,” then they, too, must be pushed from every pretended haven until the embarrassing inadequacy of their position is apparent to all, and their claims are put forward with an appropriate modesty. The best course, however, is to mitigate our conclusions by incorporating this modesty into our enterprise from the start: “The best expedient to prevent this confusion, is to be modest in our pretensions; and even to discover the difficulty ourselves before it is objected to us. By this means, we may make a kind of merit of our very ignorance” (*ECHU*, 32).

In the balance of Section IV Hume undertakes first what he describes as an “easy task,” namely, showing that our causal beliefs “are *not* founded on reasoning, or any process of the understanding.” He argues that nature is deep and secretive, and our knowledge of it so superficial, that we simply cannot connect the sensible qualities of the objects we experience with any of the real and hidden powers of these objects. Even this purely “negative argument” could in time, he suggests, become “altogether convincing”: if, despite concerted effort, no one is “ever able to discover any connecting proposition or intermediate step” establishing that particular causes will always have particular effects, then eventually we will be (by custom, of course) convinced that this fundamental ignorance is endemic.

Those who do not wish to draw so important a conclusion from the simple fact that we have as yet been unable to find an argument establishing that the future must resemble the past are invited to follow Hume in the more difficult task of showing that no existing branch of human knowledge can possibly establish this link. Reasoning, he argues, is either demonstrative or “moral”—it concerns either relations of ideas or matters of fact. Given that sound demonstrative arguments are characterized by the fact that we cannot conceive the contrary of their conclusions, and that we can conceive that the contrary of any causal claim is true, it is obvious that there can be no

demonstrative arguments establishing that, with respect to any particular cause, the future will always be like the past. The contrary of any such conclusion is readily conceivable.²⁰

On the other hand, probable arguments concerning matters of fact depend upon our knowledge of causal relations, a knowledge that depends upon the conclusions we draw from experience. But “all our experimental conclusions proceed upon the supposition, that the future will be conformable to the past” (*ECHU*, 35). To attempt by the use of probable arguments to prove that the future will resemble the past involves a patent begging of the question. This supremely important and universal belief lacks a secure foundation in both reason and experience. However uniform the past may have been, no intuition, no logic, no probable argument secures us against the possibility that all may, in a moment, be changed.

Hume’s practice, our practice, may appear to refute such doubts. We all act as though the future will resemble the past—humans are nothing if not planning animals—and consequently this doubt about the future must be mistaken. Those who pose this objection misunderstand the issue. “As an agent, I am quite satisfied in the point,” says Hume, “but as a philosopher, who has some share of curiosity, I will not say scepticism, I want to learn the foundation of this inference.” But why? What possible value in knowing the foundation of an inference we cannot in any event avoid making? And what possible benefit can arise from showing that this universal inference is unfounded? “We shall at least, by this means, be sensible of our ignorance, if we do not augment our knowledge” (*ECHU*, 38). And when we are sensible of this fundamental ignorance? Then, surely, the conditions of belief will have changed. Belief will be mitigated, and pretension, dogmatism, and intolerance will, to the extent of our new sensibility, be reduced or eliminated. Hume’s sceptical arguments, thus displayed at greater length, do offer the prospect of a “durable good or benefit to society”: the benefit of modesty and an attendant open-mindedness and tolerance.

²⁰. This argument is briefly restated near the end of Section XII: “Matter of fact and existence . . . are evidently incapable of demonstration. Whatever *is* may *not be*. No negation of a fact can involve a contradiction. The non-existence of any being, without exception, is as clear and distinct an idea as its existence. The proposition, which affirms it not to be, however false, is no less conceivable and intelligible, than that which affirms it to be. The case is different with the sciences [of quantity and number]. . . . Every proposition, which is not true, is there confused and unintelligible” (*ECHU* 163–64).

Sections X and XI of the *Enquiry* further illustrate this effort to mitigate belief. The former section focuses on miracles, the latter on the argument from design, two allegedly empirical supports of particular religious views.

Miracles are putative facts of a special kind that were (and are) used by some religious thinkers to justify their commitment to one creed or another. And, as Hume very well knew, these commitments were all too often maintained with both a mind-numbing tenacity and a dangerous and disruptive intolerance towards contrary views. Hume attempts to undermine such superstition and arrogance by providing us with an argument that will, at least “with the wise and learned, be an everlasting check to all kinds of superstitious delusion” and that, consequently, “will be useful as long as the world endures” (*ECHU*, 110). In brief, Hume does not undertake to show that the evidence for any particular miracle is inadequate. Neither does he attempt to show us that no miraculous event could possibly occur. He does, however, show us that there is something inherently problematic about miracles themselves (the then current conception of them, he suggests, is incoherent), about the evidential status of miracles (the evidence for even the most likely miracle will always be counterbalanced by the masses of evidence establishing the law of nature the miracle violates), and about the evidence that may be adduced in support of any given miracle (such evidence is always tainted). Those who have attended to this discussion are unlikely ever again to accept uncritically even well-authenticated accounts of miracles. Hume may well have hoped that most of his readers would cease to believe in miracles, but he could also hope that *even those who continue to believe in them* would be changed for the better. These individuals, despite having been exposed to Hume’s argument, will continue to believe in particular miracles, but the effective intellectual conditions of their belief may well have been changed and this belief will have been mitigated.

Hume’s strictures against the argument from design, outlined in Section XI (“Of a Particular Providence and of a Future State”) and elaborated in his posthumously published *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, have much the same effect. As commonly formulated, the argument from design purports to show that so orderly a world as ours could only be the effect of a supremely intelligent and benevolent cause, and goes on to claim that each aspect of this divine creation is well designed to fulfil an essentially beneficial function. Hume’s criticisms are themselves designed to show that the conclusions of the argument run well ahead of the evidence. In the first

place, it is not obvious that the world is so very well designed. It certainly includes pleasant and well-ordered features, but these are balanced by a good measure of the unpleasant and the plainly botched. Secondly, insofar as the argument supposes that the universe is the unique effect of a unique cause, it paints itself into a corner. As Hume had shown, what “knowledge” we have of causal connections depends on experience, on the experience of particular events of kind *a* followed by particular events of kind *b*. When this has happened often enough our imagination connects a now occurring and particular *a* with the idea of *b*'s (or a now occurring and particular *b* with the idea of *a*'s), transfers the vivacity of the present impression to the idea so aroused, and leaves us *believing* that an event of type *b* is about to occur (or that an event of type *a* has occurred). The argument from design ignores entirely the fact that the *inference* so described is fundamentally psychological, and also the fact that, as the effect in question (the universe) is unique, we cannot possibly have experiential grounds for any kind of inference about this effect.²¹ If we limit ourselves to our experiential grounds, if we are true empiricists, the most we can say is that we have this large and mixed effect, and as we have through experience come to believe that effects have causes, this effect probably does have a commensurately large and mixed cause. Moreover, as the effect is remotely like the products of our own manufacture, it seems likely “*that the cause or causes of order in the universe probably bear some remote analogy to human intelligence.*”²² Given that we have formed the habit of supposing that effects have causes, it is in that sense reasonable to suppose that the unique effect we inhabit has a cause, but this is scarcely the argument of the theologians. It is, rather, like all our causal reasoning, the projection of a learned psychological response onto reality. Once we see that, we will also find that the belief the argument engenders has been significantly modified. We may still, when we look up at the stars, feel the awe and wonder that occasions the idea of an intelligent creator, but we will recognize that

²¹. Hume also repeats this argument near the end of Section XII, there writing: “The existence, therefore, of any being can only be proved by arguments from its cause or its effect; and these arguments are founded entirely on experience. If we reason *a priori*, any thing may appear able to produce any thing. The falling of a pebble may, for aught we know, extinguish the sun; or the wish of a man controul the planets in their orbits. It is only experience, which teaches us the nature and bounds of cause and effect, and enables us to infer the existence of one object from that of another” (*ECHU*, 164).

²². This is the “concession” of Philo in the *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, 227.

this “argument,” as it provides no rational and very little experiential ground for such an inference, cannot possibly provide the kind of certainty that justifies or in any way supports sectarian pretension or dogmatic intolerance. Hume’s analysis of the causal relation has changed the conditions in which the argument from design functions to bring about belief. If we understand this analysis, we ourselves will be modified, and our belief mitigated.

IV

I set out to defend Hume from two charges: that in his criticism of the Pyrrhonists he had assumed without argument that it is impossible to live without belief, and that his own mature version of scepticism, the version of the first *Enquiry*, fails to be consistent, or consistently livable. My defences are, I believe, implicit in the account I have just sketched.

Hume does not assume without argument that it is impossible to live without belief. On the contrary, he attends in detail, and in a manner he thought new to philosophy, to the nature of belief and to the manner in which it arises. He concluded that belief is not voluntary, and with that putative fact as a premiss in his larger argument, he quite legitimately concluded that the Pyrrhonists’ recommendation that we suspend belief was pointless advice. The most we can hope to do is to moderate or mitigate our beliefs, and it is this durable and beneficial good that scepticism, properly pursued, can help us achieve. Nor is Hume’s point simply that we cannot suspend belief. He argues the more important and, for the Pyrrhonists, more devastating point that we cannot suspend belief about the non-evident. A second look at Hume’s analysis shows that he has given us good reasons for doubting the Pyrrhonists’ cherished distinction between accepting appearances and suspending belief in the non-evident. On Hume’s reading of the matter, we—and the *we* is humankind, not just the philosophers—involuntarily believe in many kinds of technically non-evident things: that the sun will rise tomorrow and that all humans will die, in necessary connections and external and continuing objects. That we are planning animals of the kind we are shows the pointlessness of the Pyrrhonian injunction. It is only occasionally that a philosopher can, momentarily and by virtue of difficult and profound reflection, suspend belief or judgement on such things: “Nature, by an absolute and

uncontrollable necessity has determin'd us to judge as well as to breathe and feel."²³

That Hume has been cleared of the charge of himself failing to provide us with a form of scepticism that can be consistently lived is perhaps less obvious. There is no denying that Hume makes the positivist recommendation to which Terry Penelhum has drawn our attention. Judged only by his explicit pronouncements, Hume does appear to be dogmatical on this point. If he is dogmatical, does it follow that he failed to offer us a consistent and viable version of scepticism? Not necessarily. Hume may indeed close the *Enquiry* on a note of unwarranted dogmatism, but the charge of inconsistency as it arises here is a charge *ad hominem*; it is a charge against the philosopher, not the philosophical position he sought to articulate.

This apparent inconsistency does not itself entail that the scepticism Hume recommends is neither viable or valuable, although it does remind us of a difficulty that Hume addressed, the difficulty that even the sceptic has, of avoiding both the appearance and the reality of philosophical rashness. After telling us that it is "only proper we shou'd in general indulge our inclination in the most elaborate philosophical researches, notwithstanding our sceptical principles," he goes on to suggest that, having yielded to this philosophical propensity, we will also find ourselves with a propensity

to be positive and certain in *particular points*, according to the light, in which we survey them in any *particular instant*. 'Tis easier to forbear all examination and enquiry, than to check ourselves in so natural a propensity, and guard against that assurance, which always arises from an exact and full survey of an object. On such an occasion we are apt not only to forget our scepticism, but even our modesty too. . . . I may have fallen into this fault after the example of others; but I here enter a *caveat* against any objections, which may be offer'd on that head; and declare that such expressions were extorted from me by the present view of the object, and imply no dogmatical spirit, nor conceited idea of my own judgment, which are sentiments that I am sensible can become no body, and a sceptic still less than any other. (*Treatise*, 273–74)

²³. *Treatise*, 183. Hume makes this remark in the course of distinguishing his position from that of certain unidentified "sceptics, who hold that all is uncertain." This is not an apt description of the Pyrrhonists, but the claim that we cannot forbear drawing conclusions beyond our present experience does clearly bear on the Pyrrhonian injunction that we suspend belief in the non-apparent.

This classic statement of the problem is, of course, from the *Treatise*, but I believe it to be no more than a prior amplification of briefer remarks found in the first *Enquiry*. There, too, we are told of the deeply seated human propensity to be “affirmative and dogmatical” and of the need for sceptics to be sceptical of even their own conclusions.

More to the point, however, is the fact that Hume’s broader general program of mitigation, the program that leads to mitigation of belief, can also be directed at his own positivist recommendation or at any other hasty determination to which the sceptic is naturally enough drawn. The sceptical program that Hume outlines shows us how to mitigate any pronouncement by showing us what he describes as “the whimsical condition of mankind.” That is, we “must act and reason and believe” even though we are unable, by the “most diligent enquiry,” to satisfy ourselves concerning “the foundation of these operations, or to remove the objections, which may be raised against them” (*ECHU*, 160). Such a program can be, and in Hume’s hands is, directed also at scepticism and at itself: the sceptic’s beliefs about scepticism and about belief itself and the conditions in which it arises can themselves be mitigated. Humean sceptics may have their rash moments, but these moments need not betray any dogmatical spirit or any desire to put oneself and one’s views beyond the scope and influence of scepticism.

Modern Work on Intentionality

William Lyons

1. Foreword

I like Festschriften. They give those who genuinely like and admire someone a chance to say so in their hearing and in public. In regard to myself (and why not?) I am reasonably confident that a small number of loyal friends, *per amore* or *per forza*, will say some quite pleasant things about me in short obituaries in some minor newspapers. Since I also firmly believe, alas, that there is no afterlife except some impersonal recycling, I shall not be around, anywhere, to be comforted or flattered by these small tributes. So quite definitely I prefer Festschriften to obituaries, and prefer that, as in this case, the former appear when the recipients are in good health and so cannot confuse them with the latter.

In this paper I am going to examine some recent work in a central area in the philosophy of mind. Almost all of my writing has been in philosophy of mind or its overlapping territory, philosophical psychology. I came to philosophy of mind and philosophical psychology because I came to do graduate work in Terry Penelhum's outstanding philosophy department at the University of Calgary where, among other areas, philosophy of mind flourished. Moreover, I was fortunate in having Terry himself as the supervisor of my now best-forgotten master's thesis. I do not employ the adjective "humble" in regard to this thesis, as its style was not graced by humility. One of my memories is of Terry gently adjusting down one of my more grandiose suggestions for a title for the thesis (was it "Principia Affectiva" I had suggested, seeing myself as adding, albeit in the area of the affections and passions, to that line that goes from Newton via Moore to Russell and Whitehead?). Terry Penelhum was the most generous and wise, and tactful, of supervisors, and quite simply both one of the best teachers I have ever had and one of the nicest persons I have ever met. It was this good fortune that led me later to pursue

research into the area of the emotions, for I came to admire greatly Terry Penelhum's papers on the cognitive aspects of pleasure.

Sadly, I cannot on this occasion offer a paper in this area of the philosophy of the emotions, as I am now too long away from it. All I could do is rehash yesterday's dinner; Terry deserves better from me. So, instead, I offer something from a reasonably cognate area of philosophy of mind, intentionality, for it is in this area that I have been working these last few years. I have tried to present what psychologists nowadays call an "overview" of recent philosophical theorising about intentionality, for the simple reason that it seems to me a useful thing to do. So many people have been talking about intentionality in so many different ways that no one is any longer confident that they know what is being said. In this essay I try to make at least the outlines of recent discussions clear and to emphasise the progress that has been made.

2. Early Theories of Intentionality

The title of this essay is "Modern Work on Intentionality," but it might just as well have been "Recent Work on Intentionality," for it is arguable that there has been more work done on intentionality in the last fifteen years than during all the other years of this century.

Let me start my account of this recent work by saying what a *theory of intentionality* is. In rounded terms and modern dress, it is a theory about how humans take in information via the senses, and in the very process of taking it in understand it and, most often, make subsequent use of it in guiding their behaviour. In particular, theorists have attempted to give a detailed account of the nature of the information-grasping and information-utilizing internal states that intervene between the senses and any ensuing behaviour, namely, such states as belief and desire, for these are thought to be the core of intentionality. In this century philosophers and psychologists have also referred to a *problem of intentionality*. The problem of intentionality is almost entirely a modern problem, as it is the problem of providing an adequate explanation of how a purely physical causal system, the brain, can both receive information and at the same time understand it, that is, to put it even more briefly, how a brain can have semantic content.

Before we look at contemporary views on intentionality, it is worth reminding ourselves that intentionality is in fact an ancient topic of enquiry. It was the mediaeval philosophers, of an Aristotelian turn of mind, who produced the first theories of intentionality.

Making great play with an obscure passage in Aristotle's *De Anima*,¹ these philosophers produced a metaphysical flow-chart of intentionality. This flow-chart depicted the senses as the windows of the mind or soul. Through these windows came the ideas or forms that were already immanent in the world, embedded in and wedded to matter. The human mind was depicted as a machine, albeit an immaterial one, for extracting the pure intelligible ideas from the material dross in which they were embedded, and then understanding them. In other words, the account suggested that a human gains the most fundamental sort of information about his or her cat by receiving through perception the very form or idea of catness into an intimate noetic embrace. The cat now lives, with *esse intentionale*, or intentional existence, in that person's mind or soul.²

Ingenious though the explanation is, it strikes the modern theoretician as metaphysical in a pejorative sense. For it seems to posit forms or ideas as little demigods incarnated in objects and organisms, and so explains human understanding as a process of releasing a demigod from its material imprisonment. Such an account strikes a contemporary philosopher or psychologist as extremely bizarre.

In the nineteenth century Brentano revived theorising about intentionality by putting the old Aristotelian-mediaeval account through a Cartesian mincer.³ Brentano's account was an inside-out or purely subjective account of what the mediaeval philosophers had tried to give an objective metaphysical account. For Brentano, like Descartes, believed that the only certain knowledge, including the only firm foundation for psychology, lay in our knowledge of our own conscious states. Thus, the only account of intentionality worth the having would be, indeed must be, a descriptive phenomenological (or what it seems like to the conscious subject) account of the mind's grasp of ideas or mental contents in various modes. In giving such a phenomenological account, Brentano believed he was giving a privi-

1. Bk. III, chap. 5, 430a, Penguin Classics, trans. and ed. Hugh Lawson-Tancred, 1982, pp. 204–5.

2. This is where the term “intentionality” comes from.

3. See Franz Brentano: *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, ed. O. Kraus, English edition ed. L. McAlister, trans. A.D. Rancurello, D.B. Terrell, and L. McAlister (1874; reprint, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973); *Sensory and Noetic Consciousness: Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint III*, ed. O. Kraus and L. McAlister, trans. M. Schattle and L. McAlister (1929; reprint, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961); *The True and the Evident*, ed. O. Kraus, English edition ed. R.M. Chisholm, trans. R.M. Chisholm, I. Politzer, and K.R. Fischer (1930; reprint, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966).

leged empirical report rather than resorting to metaphysical speculation. However, this picture of what he was endeavouring to do was muddled a little by his insistence that everything that was worth reporting—what was essential—would be whatever was sifted out when such a subjective investigator exercised his or her “intuitions of reason” upon the products of our inner perceptions of and phenomenological reports on the denizens of our stream of consciousness.

Unfortunately for Brentano, modern philosophy and psychology have set their faces resolutely against anything Cartesian. By endorsing Descartes’s substance dualism with its picture of the soul inhabiting the body like a ghostly pilot of a *Mary Celeste*, and by endorsing Aristotle’s view of psychology as “the science of the soul,” Brentano saw to it that his account of intentionality went down with the Cartesian wreck. The last floating spar of Cartesianism in psychology was the introspectionism of Wundt, Titchener, James, and the other early experimentalists, and, for better or worse, Brentano’s project of inner perception allied to intuitions of reason was viewed by many as just introspectionism with knobs on.

To see the move away from the Brentanian approach to intentionality from a different angle, it is worth recalling that the arrival first of positivism (especially in its twentieth-century form of logical positivism) and then of behaviourism made both modern philosophy and psychology resolutely materialist. In this century, except for a few attempts to revive Brentano, all theorising about intentionality has started from a standpoint of materialism of some sort. In the last fifteen years or so such theorising has become intensive. To impose some order on this field of intense activity, and given that I am permitted to engage in some pushing and pulling about, one can say that, like all of ancient Gaul, recent theorising about intentionality can be divided into three parts or, more accurately, three phases. The first phase, a reductive one, was characterised by attempts to show that intentionality was merely a feature of our ordinary, common-sense mental vocabulary. The second phase, a reaction to the first, amounted to a concerted attempt to demonstrate that intentionality was a real feature of our brains, albeit a linguistic one, because it was a feature of “the language of the human brain.” The third phase might be described as both a reaction against the whole linguistic approach to intentionality and a proclamation that intentionality was a real biological feature of the human organism. These three views about intentionality are still very much alive and vying with one another for the title of “best theory.”

3. The Reduction of Intentionality

To suggest that the new reductive, materialist approaches to intentionality, first reconnoitred in the early part of this century, were simply the result of the behaviourist victories over Cartesianism in both philosophy and psychology would be an oversimplification. Matters were much more complex. At least as important as the rise of behaviourism was the retooling of nineteenth-century positivism by the logical positivists of the Vienna Circle, and the consequent reshaping of the style and content of a great deal of modern philosophy. Since a central platform of positivism in any form was its belief that the only genuine knowledge was scientific knowledge, and a central platform of logical positivism was its belief that the only task remaining for a “scientific philosophy” was that of laying bare the logical and conceptual bases of the natural sciences, any philosopher in broad sympathy with this outlook would have agreed that philosophy had become the study of the language of science.

Thus, to engage in philosophy of mind at this time was to study the language of the science of psychology. However, since psychology was a human and not a basic science, and since another aim of positivism was to reduce less basic sciences to basic sciences, this study of the language of psychology was often seen as the enterprise of discovering how statements in the language of psychology, that is, mental or intentional talk (or talk in terms of beliefs, desires, hopes, and so on), could be reduced to statements in the language of one of the basic natural sciences. For logical positivists held that, strictly speaking, only statements expressed in the vocabulary of some basic natural science could be literally true, for only these statements literally described what objects and events were really there. Since neurophysiology was (and perhaps still is) in its infancy, it was held that the immediate and feasible task of the philosopher of mind was to translate intentional psychological statements into the more objective and so more scientific statements of behavioural science, with the hope that at some time in the future these statements in turn could be translated into neurophysiological statements, and eventually into statements in the vocabulary of physics, the most basic of all sciences.

So it was that, for a philosopher such as Carnap, the philosophical study of intentionality became the philosophical study of our intentional vocabulary with a view to discovering the correct analysis of

the words in it.⁴ This in turn would facilitate the translation of our intentional or psychological vocabulary into a more scientific vocabulary, that is, one that referred only to empirically observable objects and events. If it turned out that some words in our psychological vocabulary did not readily translate into a more scientific vocabulary, then so much the worse for our psychological vocabulary. Such words were to be discarded.

Those who followed after Carnap, such as Quine, found no difficulty in holding that our intentional (or intensional) vocabulary of beliefs, desires, and so on does not pick out real objects or events.⁵ In Quine's way of putting it, an intentional vocabulary cannot be reduced to an extensional vocabulary, that is, to a vocabulary whose words gain their meaning in terms of their extension, or those things in the world to which they refer. As useful as our intentional vocabulary might be in our ordinary social intercourse, we should not be misled thereby into thinking that intentional accounts are true descriptions of the world or anything in it. Intentionality is not a real feature of minds or brains, but merely a feature of an unscientific psychological vocabulary.

If this view were correct, the old problems and puzzles about intentionality would disappear at a stroke. For there is no mind but only a brain, and the brain does not operate in terms of information-bearing contents. Put starkly, the brain is not a semantic engine. Meaning and intentionality are merely a feature of a certain sort of unscientific vocabulary that humans employ in unscientific contexts to talk about themselves.

Daniel Dennett, on the other hand, although he might reasonably be described as being in direct line of descent from Carnap and Quine, has much more to say in support of our intentional vocabulary than had either Carnap or Quine.⁶ He sees our intentional

⁴. See especially Rudolph Carnap, "Psychology in Physical Language," in *Logical Positivism*, ed. A.J. Ayer (New York: Collier Macmillan, 1959), and *The Logical Syntax of Language*, trans. A. Smeaton (London: Kegan Paul, 1937).

⁵. See W.V.O. Quine: "Autobiography of W.V. Quine," in *The Philosophy of W.V. Quine*, ed. L. Hahn and P. Schilpp (New York: Open Court, 1986); *Word and Object* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1960); *From a Logical Point of View*, 2d ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961); and "Mind and Verbal Dispositions," in *Mind and Language*, ed. S. Guttenplan (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).

⁶. See Daniel Dennett: *Content and Consciousness* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986); *Brainstorms: Philosophical Essays on Mind and Psychology* (Brighton, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1978); and *The Intentional Stance* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1967).

vocabulary as resulting from our taking up a certain stance, the intentional stance, to humans or animals (and sometimes, by analogy, to machines). We describe a piece of human behaviour, say Fred's running in a certain direction, as running away out of fear rather than running to get something or simply running for the purpose of athletic exercise, because we attribute to Fred a motivation of fear, because we also attribute to Fred a belief that a man in the crowd behind him has a gun, a belief that this man wants to shoot him, a desire to avoid being shot, and a belief that the best way of doing this is to get the hell out of there.

We do not attribute such intentional attitudes as beliefs and desires to humans or animals, says Dennett, as a result of a scientific inspection of their minds or brains, but as a result of viewing them, their environment, and their reactions to their environment from a general common-sense, or "folk-psychological," standpoint. This standpoint attempts to produce clear and rational explanations of human behaviour in terms of the purely invented internal, intentional states of belief, desire, hope, wish, want, and so on. We employ these Brentano-like descriptions of what goes on inside the human head not because we have discovered that they are true descriptions of what goes on inside human heads, but simply because we have found them to be a *useful* way of describing humans when we seek to understand them and to predict their actions and reactions.

Dennett reminds us that, for certain purposes, we may wish to pass over our ordinary intentional accounts in favour of accounts that we generate from other, more scientific stances, such as the design stance or the physical stance. For these latter stances do involve scientific investigation of how the brain does in fact operate, and so the resulting vocabularies will reflect to some degree our empirical knowledge of the brain's actual economy. The design stance, as applied to human brains, will be an account of the brain's design and functioning from which, in theory at least, one can predict the effects, in terms of ordinary human behaviour, of a brain designed and functioning in just such a way. The physical stance, applied to human brains, will be an account of the brain's physics and chemistry put to the same use, namely, of developing an account that will yield behavioural predictions. In the spirit of Carnap and Quine, Dennett sees the intentional stance, delivering as it does merely "folk" accounts (albeit very useful ones) rather than scientific ones, as being inferior to the other stances. For ordinary purposes, there is no substitute for descriptions generated by the intentional stance. For scientific purposes, however, including the production of a truly

scientific psychology, we should hope and expect to leave behind the intentional stance in favour of the other two.

For these reductivists, then, intentionality is nothing but a sort of vocabulary generated by taking up an unscientific, but for ordinary purposes useful, folk-psychological stance. Descriptions couched in terms of such a vocabulary are not true descriptions, for the key words in such descriptions—belief, desire, hope, want, and so on—do not pick out real states or processes in the brain. Our intentional talk does not carve nature at its neurophysiological or physical joints.

What are we to think of such a view? Should we allow the reductivists to solve the problem of intentionality by producing a theory that amounts to saying, “Off with intentionality’s head—there is no such thing”? That is, should we allow such a swingeing view—the sort of view the Queen of Hearts in *Alice in Wonderland* might have produced—to count as a *solution* to the problem of intentionality?

In one sense, it clearly is a solution. If intentionality is just a feature of a certain vocabulary that we employ in certain circumstances, then all the knots that the mediaeval philosophers and the Brentanians got themselves into are cut away at a stroke. However, if we look at the solution a little more closely, we might begin to feel that it does strain credulity. For it does seem odd to say that our intentional vocabulary works, in the sense of “having predictive power,” yet has *no relation to any facts* of the matter. This would be like discovering that astrological predictions of human behaviour genuinely predict yet there is definitely no connection between the movements of the stars and human behaviour. Such continual coincidence between a prediction on the basis of irrelevant facts and somebody’s behaviour would strain belief. We would look for relevant facts.

Once we begin to find relevant facts upon which to base our intentional descriptions of humans, and Dennett himself would admit that we must, then the reductivist view is sliding down a slippery slope to a view whereby intentionality has a lot more to it than just being a feature of our talk about humans. For once we start attributing knowledge or beliefs or desires to some human on the basis of observing what that person has perceived in regard to his or her environment, we are more than half-way to saying that such a person is in possession of information about the immediate environment. Having arrived at this point, one is tempted to add that the information must be, in some sense, in the person’s head. That is, it begins to look as if, after all, intentionality is really “in the head” in some way. For it is difficult to resist the conclusion that possessing information

involves knowledge and that knowing about something or other is a paradigm of an intentional state. At any rate, historically speaking, the main reaction to the reductivists has involved a sustained attempt to demonstrate that intentionality is a real feature of what goes on inside human heads.

4. The Return to Representation

While they agree that mention of our intentional vocabulary is an important part of a complete account of intentionality, those reacting against the reductivist view primarily want to show that intentionality is a real representational feature of our brains. Thus, there has been a continual and dogged attempt, notably on the part of Jerry Fodor, to put forward a physicalist theory of mental representation that would make clear how brain states and processes could be intentional.⁷ This theory puts forward the view that brain states and processes are able to contain within themselves information-bearing contents that at the same time are understood (at least in the sense of being utilised on the basis of their meaning) by the brain.

Fodor's theory, building upon Chomsky's theory about an innate "universal grammar," claims that there is a real "language of the brain" that is the medium by which our brains represent to themselves information-bearing contents.⁸ This language of the brain is the language of thought. The brain encodes information-bearing contents in computational form, for the brain is a computational mechanism. Like a digital computer, the brain is a "symbol cruncher," and the general theory that holds that it is so is called by Fodor a "representational theory of the mind." Put in the simplest terms, a reductivist account of intentionality, such as that of Dennett, holds that when we are said to believe that it is now raining, our heads do not contain states or processes that encapsulate or embed or encode or depict or represent in any way at all the sentence, or the proposition underlying the sentence, "It is now raining"; we merely find it very useful to think and speak as if they did. Fodor, on the

⁷. See Jerry Fodor: *The Language of Thought* (Brighton, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1976); *Representations: Philosophical Essays on the Foundations of Cognitive Science* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981); *The Modularity of Mind: An Essay on Faculty Psychology* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1963); and *Psychosemantics: The Problem of Meaning in the Philosophy of Mind* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1967).

⁸. See Noam Chomsky, *Language and Mind* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1966); and John Lyons, *Chomsky* (Glasgow: Fontana-Collins, 1977).

contrary, believes that when we believe it is now raining, in a perfectly literal sense our heads do contain the proposition “It is now raining” encoded in the brain’s language of thought. Intentional states, such as those of belief and desire, are a natural kind, for they are a real kind of state that real brains have.

This theory of the mind-cum-brain as a representational system is supported, Fodor believes, by the fact that an adequate theory of concept learning, language learning, and perception seems to demand reference to real representational systems in the brain. Concept learning, for example, appears to be an inductive process of gradually representing to ourselves a set of necessary and sufficient conditions, or perhaps some more flaccid but functionally similar substitute. Thus, to gain the concept of “chair,” we need to work out what is essential to something’s being a chair, and the process of working this out involves representing to ourselves interim definitions expressed in the brain’s language of thought. For the trial-and-error process—of putting forward for consideration possible concepts, of pitting counter-examples against the proposed concepts, and then of producing amended versions of the concepts—must include a medium for representing the proposals that have to be put to the test. Further, it seems unscientific to limit the ability to form concepts to those already in possession of natural languages when the ability itself to learn natural languages seems to entail making use of concepts (or some stand-in for them) expressed in a prior innate language of thought. For example, Fodor argues, learning how to employ correctly a predicate term in a natural language seems to involve the very same sort of operations as concept formation, namely, hypothesis formation and the subsequent testing of the hypothesis. More controversially, Fodor alleges that perception also intimately involves hypothesis formation and testing, except that in this context we are more likely to call the process an interpretation of the incoming micro-stimulation rather than the formation of an hypothesis. Given that this interpretative aspect of our perceptions is almost entirely a non-conscious affair, the use of the term “hypothesis” becomes even less apt in this context.

The intentionality of mind, then, according to Fodor, occurs at the level of the language of the brain. In that sense, it remains a linguistic feature or, more precisely, a representational feature. Our natural public languages include intentional vocabularies because our brain is intentional, not vice versa. Our natural public languages are intentional insofar as a segment of those languages is employed in describing, or at least in giving expression to, what the human organ-

ism is doing when it believes, thinks, hopes, desires, and so on. In turn, the intentionality of a mental process, such as that of believing or desiring, is to be found in the computational relation between an organism and some formula in the brain of that organism. This formula is in turn a piece of information symbolically represented in that organism's internal language of the brain. More widely viewed, the cognitive life of our human brains is an intentional life because, in their cognitive mode, human brains operate over informational contents represented in the brain's own language. This feature of our brains' functioning is accurately expressed in our natural languages in a propositional way. Thus, we say humans believe "that so and so is the case" or desire "that such and such be the case." Hence, philosophers and cognitive psychologists quite rightly sometimes use the term "propositional attitudes" as a synonym for mental states of an intentional kind. Viewed through an even more widely angled lens, the cognitive life of the brain involves an interplay of these propositional attitudes that is at one and the same time causal and rational and intentional. Thus, Fodor believes that, if his account is correct, he has shown both how the intentionality of mind is to be preserved and how it can be naturalised.

While this view of intentionality does not resurrect Brentano's view that, in relation to all other sciences, psychology is foundational, it does make psychology autonomous in a very strong sense. This is why Fodor is the darling of cognitive psychology and cognitive science. For not merely does his representational theory of mind suggest that the unit of psychological functioning, and so the unit for study by psychologists, is the intentional attitude. It also suggests that this intentional commerce cannot be reduced to its physics or even its neurophysiology. An intentional state or propositional attitude is a complex brain operation whereby one part (or system or network) of the brain encodes information in the language of the brain and another operates over it. In turn, this may lead to a causal chain involving other intentional states. The causal impetus of such a chain of intentional states follows in a rational way the meanings of the encoded information capsules. Thus, a true psychological account of humans is an account that must remain at the intentional level, and so cannot be reinterpreted or translated or reduced to any other descriptive level above or below it; any attempt to do so would distort the fact that the causal explanations of human psychology are ineliminably at the intentional level. Psychology is irreducibly different from physics or physiology, for it is the *sui generis* study of intentional systems.

Half-jokingly, but only half, Jerry Fodor, when delivering the 1989 Donnellan Lectures at Trinity College, Dublin, said that he was probably the only person who now defended his view of intentionality. It is true that many have felt that in reacting against the view that intentionality is just a feature of our folk-psychological talk about the mind, Fodor has gone too far in the opposite direction. For, in effect, he is alleging that our folk-psychological descriptions of our propositional attitudes—that is, our talk about our belief that so and so and our desire that such and such—more or less accurately describe the way the brain works. He is alleging that our intentional talk does carve nature at its joints and so reveals to us neurophysiological truths. This strikes some of Fodor’s critics as incredible. For if our ancestors, and for that matter most of us who now travel on the bus to Clapham or Connecticut, have no knowledge of neurophysiology, how is it that our folk-psychological categories of belief and desire and hope and so on pick out real brain states and processes? Have we been doing neurophysiology all along without realising it?

From a different perspective, to make our folk psychology a litmus test for evaluating the discoveries of our professional psychological science seems to misconstrue the nature of folk psychology. It is like taking the semaphored messages of a racecourse “tick-tack man” as a serious contribution to literature. Folk psychology is good for the quick-and-easy understanding of humans that ordinary folk need, and maybe it is indispensable for this task, but it should not be asked to do more than this.

At a different level of scrutiny, the whole idea of an innate language of thought seems fishy to many people. For if the language or representational system is innate, how can the symbols in the system have gained meaning for the person in whose brain they reside? The person in question cannot have given them meaning in any way, for the language in question arrives with himself or herself at birth. Besides, how could one set about giving meaning to states or processes in the brain so as to transform them into symbols? We are not normally aware of our own brain states or processes. The only alternative, not to be taken seriously, I presume, is that, like the slave boy in Plato’s *Meno*, we learned the meanings of the representations or symbols of the language of our brains in some manner in a previous life.

If Fodor or, in general, someone who advocates the reality of a language of the brain attempts to block this scepticism by saying that the sense of “language” in question is that of “machine language,” the problem does not go away. For in the case of a machine language, it

was some human designer who made sure that the mechanistic processes of a computer are correlated, via a compiler, with some natural language. But who is the “designer” in the case of an innate language of the brain? And, a much harder question, what do you choose as a substitute for your correlative natural language in the case of infants who have as yet no natural language? There may be answers here in terms of “natural selection” and evolution, but they are not easy to work out, as we shall see in the next phase of the debate. For it was to biology that those who sought for the true account of intentionality next turned.

5. The Appeal to Teleology

As with so much that has happened in philosophy of mind and philosophical psychology over the last twenty years, it was America that “made the running” in biologising intentionality.⁹ In particular, it is the work of Ruth Garrett Millikan that has led the way.¹⁰ If we wish to naturalise intentionality and so make it part of the seamless cloth that is nature, Millikan asserts, then the correct and natural way of doing so is to look upon our ordinary intentional acts of believing or desiring or hoping or intending as the activity of biological devices whose proper or intended effects define their proper functions. Thinking and believing and desiring are just as much part of our biological functioning as are eating and sleeping. Thus, the ability to form beliefs is a biological device that is “designed” by evolution to have the effect of producing true beliefs in the believer. A true belief is one that is an accurate “map,” or in some sense is an accurate account of how the world is, which in turn will enable the believer to find his or her way in the world. The content of a belief is intentional in much the same way as a map or picture is.

By way of analogy, consider the waggle dance of the honey-bees. A scout bee returns to the hive and dances. Close observation of this

⁹. While “philosophy of mind” and “philosophical psychology” are “open-textured” terms that also overlap, a reasonable account of each is that philosophy of mind involves a consideration of problems about the nature of mind as they have arisen in the history of philosophy, and philosophical psychology is an investigation of philosophical problems that occur at the theoretical level of psychology.

¹⁰. See Ruth Garrett Millikan: *Language, Thought, and Other Biological Categories: New Foundations for Realism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984); “Biosemantics,” *Journal of Philosophy* 86 (1989); “In Defense of Proper Functions,” *Philosophy of Science* 61 (1989); and “Speaking up for Darwin,” in *Meaning in Mind: Fodor and His Critics*, ed. G. Rey and B. Loewer (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991).

dance enables another group of sister bees from the same hive to fly to where there are flowers with nectar and pollen (bee food). The dance is *about* the whereabouts of nectar and pollen because that has been the biologically standard “reading” of it by honey-bees for who knows how long. Just as evolution has secured the success of the dance of the honey-bees, so evolution has secured the success of human beliefs when the belief-forming systems function, biologically speaking, in a standard way. The content of a human belief differs from the content of the bees’ waggle dance only insofar as humans can engage in a further procedure for identifying what their belief is about. A human has the ability to test whether the content of his or her belief truly matches or maps the world, whereas a bee cannot do this in regard to the pattern choreographed by the waggle dancers; it can only succeed or fail to find nectar after “reading” another bee’s waggle dance. Thus, the content of a human belief is representational to the believer while the content of a bee’s waggle dance is not representational for any bee.

This account of content can be extended to meaning in general. In short, we can produce a “biosemantics.”¹¹ Thus, the meaning of an indicative sentence, for example, will be that part of the world that, in a biological sense, it standardly maps from the point of view of an interpreter or responder (that is, the “biological co-operator” in this system) when the sentence is true.

In her most recent work, Millikan has explored the relation between folk psychology and professional psychology in the light of her own theory. To borrow a section title from one of her recent papers, Millikan views “psychology as a branch of biology.”¹² She argues that folk psychology is a good starting point for a scientific psychology because the belief-desire type (or “propositional attitude”) descriptions of our folk psychology do pick out real natural kinds (or kinds of thing that really do occur in nature). In this respect she agrees with Fodor. Where she differs from Fodor is in giving a purely biological-cum-evolutionary account of beliefs, desires, and other propositional attitudes, and their contents. The job of psychology, Millikan would say, is not, as Fodor would maintain, one of deciphering some language of the brain, but one of working out the proper biological function of brain states and processes. This task is, or should be,

¹¹. Compare this with the title of a recent book by Fodor: *Psychosemantics*.

¹². See Millikan, “Thoughts without Laws: Cognitive Science without Content,” *Philosophical Review* 95 (1986).

straightforward and carried on in much the same way as would an investigation into the proper function of the liver or the adrenal glands. For function is the key to content. Contents are not “in the head” in some literally propositional way and encoded in some language of the brain, as Fodor would claim, but are relational properties. They are partly internal but partly not, in the manner of all internal devices whose functions connect them with the external world.

Perhaps because Millikan is most obviously reacting against Fodor’s views on intentionality, Fodor has repaid the compliment by being the sternest critic of the biological approach to intentionality.¹³ The general tenor of Fodor’s objections is that evolution is too blunt an instrument for extracting the contents of propositional attitudes, and so too blunt an instrument for the provision of a precise account of intentionality. An appeal to nature as favouring or selecting what is useful for the survival of some organism may suggest that a human’s belief-forming system or desire-producing system is survival enhancing, but such an appeal is of little or no help in telling us that the current effect of that person’s belief-forming system is a belief that her aunt is overly ambitious. Such a belief is not obviously related to survival, and is not even obviously related to the supposed basic mapping function of any belief-forming system. Besides, Fodor points out, it requires an initial leap of scientific faith even to accept that a belief-forming system or desire-producing system must have been directly selected as survival enhancing by natural selection rather than merely thrown up as a non-survival-enhancing by-product or concomitant of some process that was directly selected.¹⁴

Fodor also suggests that individuating content in terms of the standard effects of a biological device, one that is functioning in a normal way in its biologically normal environment, would mean, if this were the whole story, that any biological device—for example my respiration system—must be said to have content. Thus, if the content of my belief is the map of the way I would need to go to get

¹³. In his “Problems of Content in the Philosophy of Mind” (Donnellan Lectures, Trinity College, Dublin, 1989).

¹⁴. In his review of Millikan’s *Language, Thought, and Other Biological Categories*, Peter Godfrey-Smith writes: “Her model explanations are biological, yet it is well known that within biology there has lately been a reaction against the Panglossian or optimising view of natural selection. Stephen Jay Gould and Richard Lewontin spearhead the reaction, claiming that the products of evolution are not collections of independently selected, perfectly functioning parts, but a tangle of engineering compromises, including many features with no function” (*Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 66 [1988]: 559).

from Dublin to Galway that my belief-forming system formed when it functioned in a biologically normal way when I wanted to travel to Galway, then the content of my respiration system is the rapid breathing for two minutes that my respiration device (made up of lungs, rib muscles, diaphragm, and so on) engaged in when placed in the context of my running to catch the bus to Galway. Both the map of the external world and the increase in the respiration rate are the biologically proper effects or responses of each respective biological system when functioning normally. Why, then, should we say that the former effect is a mental or intentional one but the latter not?

The only response for the teleologist or biological psychologist seems to be to say that this is not the whole story. Believing is a mental act and breathing is not precisely because believing produces representations or true contents and breathing does not. However, in giving this sort of response, Fodor would say, one abandons the biological game. For the response amounts to saying that what distinguishes mental content from other effects is the representational or mapping character of the contents of beliefs and other cognitive states. That, Fodor might tartly add, is a position on intentional content that is not a million miles away from his own representational theory of mind.

Fodor is not the only critic of this teleological approach to intentionality. P.F. Snowdon, for example, in a review of David Papineau's *Reality and Representation*, which defends a teleological-cum-biological approach to psychology, makes the following shrewd point:

Due to a random mutation, a creature is produced with a new sense organ and connected neural system which provides it with information about aspects of its environment. The system performs a highly advantageous function and persists and spreads. It therefore gets selected to perform that function. However, how do we characterize in cognitive, representational terms the very first creature to possess it? In it, the system had not been *selected* for anything, because the processes of selection had not had [a] chance to operate.¹⁵

In other words, Snowdon suggests that, according to the teleological-cum-biological view, the first inner product from this new sense organ could not be considered to be about anything (to be a content), because no “evolutionary proper function” for the sense organ has yet been established. The environment has yet to test this

¹⁵. See *Mind* 97 (1988): 630.

randomly produced sensory system for survival value or fitness. On the other hand, all our intuitions tell us that here we have a new sensory system because, in much the same way as our other sensory systems, it reacts to stimuli from the environment. Furthermore, the story about how this system or process was produced by random mutation (or recombination, perhaps) will not be science fiction. It will be merely an account of the usual biological birth of any new system or process in an organism. For every new biological system or process must, in the beginning, be untested by evolution. Selection for fitness can only begin after a biological system or process has emerged. As Snowdon observes, such a consideration should incline us to the view “that ‘biologising’ content underestimates (even if other approaches overestimate) the degree to which psychology is individualistic.”¹⁶

Finally, it occurs to me that the teleologists join the queue for a lot of trouble when they so readily accept our folk-psychological categories of belief and desire as biological ones (or, at least, ones that can be connected up to biological proper functions). Such categories do not seem to be biological ones, and any search for their biological proper functions seems bound to produce bizarre results. Indeed, such a starting point strikes one as very Brentanian. For nowadays more and more philosophers and psychologists are suggesting that our vocabulary of propositional attitudes—our vocabulary of beliefs, desires, hopes, wants, intentions, wishes, and so on—does not carve nature at its biological or physiological joints. It is a cultural artifact. It is part of a folk psychology, which is a useful and probably indispensable way of making sense of ourselves and others. But it is not biology, and if we try to do biology, or a naturalistic psychology, on the basis of it, we will end up with failure.

Besides, would not a thoroughgoing doctrine of psychology as biology deny any role to our belief-desire type vocabulary, on the grounds that it is hopelessly infected with Brentanian (if not Cartesian and Platonic) assumptions about the nature of mind? The obvious platform from which to deliver such a doctrine would seem to be biology itself. The platform should be that there are only those mental items or types of items (in a teleologist’s ontology) that are sanctioned by a mature biology. We seek to discover the biological proper functions of biologically proper organs and devices. What could be simpler? Perhaps it is the price, the cost, that gives a teleologist pause.

¹⁶. Ibid.

The price, presumably, is the one of which Quine has so frequently reminded us: if you reduce psychology to biology or neurophysiology or, ultimately, physics, then ipso facto you will be involved in a purely extensional vocabulary, and your thesis will be a physicalist one. In such an enterprise, all talk of content and intentionality must be left behind. To try to reduce talk of content and intentionality to something that can only be described with an extensional vocabulary is to miss the point. Such reduction is impossible. You cannot reduce what is not about objects and events and causal relations to what is.

6. Towards a New, Multifaceted Theory of Intentionality

At first glance, this picture of recent work on intentionality may appear bleak. It looks as if we have three competing theories, none of which commands general allegiance or can claim to be the right theory. It looks like a record of failed attempts.

The true picture, it seems to me, is otherwise, for from Carnap to Millikan a lot has been learned. The reductionists have taught us that a study of our folk-psychological intentional vocabulary will not tell us anything about psychological realities inside human heads when these heads take in, understand, process, and then employ information. The representationalists were right to say that an adequate account of intentionality must make reference to real sensory-information-containing states of the human brain.

On the other hand, I believe that the teleologists are right to complain that modern work on intentionality has been bedevilled by the *language* of intentionality. Whatever might be the true description of internal states related to intentionality, it is most likely that they are *not* propositional or even logico-linguistic in form. Our talk of beliefs and desires and hopes and wants and so on does not carve our neurophysiology or biology at its joints. A naturalised account of intentionality will look very different from anything envisaged by our common-sense or folk psychology.

So what will a naturalised account of intentionality look like, according to me?

In the first place, I believe that the brain is not a representational system. There is no language of the brain. Intentionality is not a representational feature of brains. On the other hand, I want to argue that there is a language of thought. This language is natural

language, with its linguistic concepts, in which any adult human thinks.

However, let me return to the brain for a moment. The human brain appears to be an analogue system rather than a semantic engine, though our conscious thinking is done semantically because it is done in terms of the concepts of some natural language. But, then, I hold that consciousness is a product of the brain in much the same way as my moving my hand when waving goodbye is. It is not the brain functioning.

The brain functions always and only electrochemically, and there is no electrochemical language or code that represents information coming through the senses. In fact, “information” is a misnomer in this context; rather, the brain records or registers incoming stimuli analogically. What do I mean by the term “analogically” here? Let me give a simple example. Let us say that the world heavyweight boxing champion punched me on the nose with his right fist travelling at twenty miles per hour such that, say, my nose contracted from its outer perimeter by two centimetres before bouncing back, painfully no doubt, to its original position and shape. If in the next round the world heavyweight boxing champion punched me on the nose with his right fist travelling at forty miles per hour, then, let us say, my nose contracted from its outer perimeter by four centimetres before resuming, this time probably more slowly and even more painfully, its original contours. My nose has become a register of the speed of the champion’s punches in an analogue way. My nose has not represented the punch syntactically: there is no language of noses that represents punches, though an experienced boxing trainer may have been able to “read off” a lot about the fight afterwards from an examination of my nose.

The *modus operandi* of my brain is a bit like that of my nose during the boxing match. The human brain has developed during evolution in such a way that it registers in analogue fashion many features of the incoming stimuli that are picked up by our sensory systems. For example, our visual system registers differences in the wavelength of light waves entering the eye. It also registers differences in the angle of entry of light waves to the eye; and so on. This registering or recording is done electrochemically. Animals are at the top of the evolutionary tree, among other reasons, because their central processing systems fit in so well with the electromagnetic radiation that crowds the environment. Animals, including humans, are electrochemical systems, which can reduce all incoming stimuli —

whether they be light waves or sound waves or particles in motion—to the common currency of electrical impulses.

If you are still tempted to look upon the brain's electrochemical processing as involving a language or at least a code, reflect on the following. A *language* is a system comprising a set of different symbols and a grammar or set of rules for how these are to be combined in order to form words and then sentences; and so about how these symbols are to be employed in order to communicate information or engage in meaningful expressions. A *code* is a series of different ciphers or non-significant marks and is used, together with a set of transformation rules, for converting a language communication or text into covert form. Neither our brains nor our telephone systems employ languages or codes.

When you utter the sentence “Would you like to come to lunch tomorrow?” into the handset of the telephone, the vibrations in the air of your voiced invitation set up resonant vibrations in a metal diaphragm in the mouthpiece of the handset. These vibrations in the diaphragm, in turn, are transformed into electrical impulses that are conducted along the telephone wires to the earpiece of the handset in the hands of the person receiving your invitation. The electrical impulses reaching the earpiece are, via a process involving an electromagnet and another diaphragm, transformed back, reasonably accurately, though strictly speaking imperfectly, into vibrations in the air like those you set up when you first voiced your invitation and which now resonate on the eardrum of the listener.

The telephone has neither encoded nor translated your invitation to lunch. It has not encoded your invitation because it has neither understood nor followed a set of instructions for rendering covert what was a plain and open invitation to lunch. It has not translated your invitation because it neither understands English or any other language, nor employs any device that tacitly does. All the telephone has done is to act as a linguistic transmission device. It has extended the range of your voice from twenty yards to twenty miles or two thousand miles.

The brain does not translate what its senses receive, nor does it encode or render covert any text. It records aspects of incoming stimulation in an analogue, telephone-like way, processes them, and produces evolutionarily appropriate behaviour. You cannot read my brain waves because there is no text to read. On the other hand, some future clever scientist may be able to transform my brain waves back into light waves or sound waves, and these light waves or sound waves may then be seen or heard as text or conversation.

There are no propositional attitudes in the brain because there are no propositions in the brain. And there are no propositions in the brain because there are no sentences in the brain that could express these propositions.

From time to time, however, we may harbour in our heads, but not in our brains, *expressions of our propositional attitudes*. For when we are reasonably mature and have learned a natural language we will be able to construct sentences of the form, "I believe that it is now raining" or "She hopes that she will be able to get the job." Then we can say these sentences over to ourselves, in our own language and accent, in a conscious "replay" of our heard speech, or we can read these sentences via a conscious imagining of a text with the sentences written on one of its pages. These will be "in our head" insofar as conscious experiences of this sort are "in our head."

From time to time we will also hear someone talking to us in terms of some propositional attitude. She might say, "I believe that it will be a hot summer" or "He knows that I can't stand him." This will enter our heads, via sound waves, in much the same way as any sound waves do, that is, through our ears.

However, other than by means of this "talking to oneself," or hearing someone else talk, propositional attitudes are not in our head, nor in any way in our brain. Propositional attitudes are the product of our conceptual skills put to the task of saying why someone acted or reacted in a certain way. A child who has few concepts might observe, "Mummy's crying." The next-door neighbour who is comforting Mummy might say, "Mummy's crying because she knows that her friend Mary is dead, and because she loved Mary and believes that Mary's death is a tragedy, as Mary was so young and had so much to offer." The neighbour, the adult, is able to place the observed behaviour, the crying, into a deep psychological context. She can give reasons for the mother's tears in terms of attitudes of belief and hope and want and wish. Thus, attribution of psychological attitudes is not the result of any look inside the mother's head or of listening to any introspective reports given by the mother. However, the attribution is dependent upon knowledge of some facts about the mother, including some facts about her dealings with Mary. The neighbour tells the child that Mummy is crying because she loved Mary. The neighbour may have learned of the mother's love for Mary by learning that the mother supported Mary financially during the last ten years, always rushed to her aid when she was ill, went on holiday with her, always spoke well of her, and so on.

A child can be the recipient of propositional attitude attributions before she can make them. We might say, for example, that an infant who is just a few days old knows that her mother has entered the room or knows that the light is on, although she has no concept of maternity or of light source. What is being attributed is some primitive state of knowing that the face in front of one is familiar or that there has been a change in the amount of available light. This is still far too sophisticated an account of what it is that the infant knows, which is so primitive, although basic and foundational, that our ordinary-language concepts are incapable of expressing it. Nevertheless, an infant warrants attributions of propositional attitudes of knowing. For an infant has real knowledge; it knows its mother and some other things (that is, it has *knowledge of*), and knows how to grab its mother's nose and to do some other useful things (that is, it has some *knowledge how*). What it lacks, of course, is *knowledge that*, for this is sophisticated, conceptual, language-based knowledge.

Admittedly, our propositional attitude talk is most at ease and convincing when it is about mature humans who also talk in propositional attitude terms about themselves and others. For the point of this way of talking is that it is sophisticated, culture-based adult *communication* rather than just observer-like description. The human brain is more or less completely matured by the time a child is three or four years old. Further psychological development after this age is in terms of learning about itself and others, and the interplay between the two in terms of the culture's vehicle for achieving this understanding, its common-sense or folk psychology. This, in turn, is only possible for those with speech or some other way of forming and learning concepts. *That* is the part language plays in intentionality.

Of course, too, the brain has some part to play in intentionality, although it is a complex and distant part. There are no brain contents that are related in any one-to-one way to the propositional contents of our propositional attitude talk. The brain's part is as cause of the actions and reactions that are one of the main sources of grounds for the attribution of propositional attitude expressions. Put crudely, we attribute propositional attitudes to humans in the light of input plus output. Input is presumed sensory observation of the environment; output is action or reaction or failure to exhibit either. The brain is the causal intermediary between the two.

For example, I could say that the lioness believes that there is some other animal in the vicinity because she sniffed the wind, then turned upwind, and finally began to stalk upwind. We would say that the term "belief" is attributed in this context in a downgraded way

because the lioness is not part of our concept-forming, folk-psychologising species. But I can make a similar claim about a sentry at an armaments factory during wartime, and this claim is not an etiolated or downgraded one. I might say that the North Korean soldier knows that we are in the vicinity because he adopted a listening attitude, then called over his fellow sentries, then pointed in our direction, and together with the other sentries is now approaching the area where we are hiding. The lioness's brain and the sentry's brain are both producers of appropriate output in the light of input, and so both are part of the causal conditions that produced the evidence on the basis of which we attribute propositional attitudes to animals and humans.

In more technical terminology, propositional attitude terms like "knowing," "believing," and "hoping" are dispositional terms. Like all dispositional terms, they attribute dispositions or pronenesses or liabilities.

A believer is someone who is prone to do certain things, including saying and thinking certain things, in certain circumstances. One sort of believer is a believer that there is an enemy soldier in the vicinity. The sentry is just such a believer, unless he is "faking it," because after taking up a listening attitude he unslung his rifle, called over his mates, and then stalked off in the direction to which he had been pointing. The structural or categorical base of the sentry's disposition to believe that an enemy is in the vicinity is his brain (or some process in it), just as the categorical or structural base for the disposition of a piece of Venetian glass to break very easily is its internal physicochemical composition. Brains are the basis of human dispositions to say and do and think various things, and in that roundabout way brains are connected to an observer's "reading" or some human's actions and reactions in terms of one or more propositional attitudes.

Put most baldly, my view explains away both brain content and mental content. All we are left with is an analogue-processing brain, sensory systems, behaviour, dispositions, a sophisticated folk psychology of propositional attitudes, and thought and its vehicle, consciousness. But that's a hell of a lot and as much as we need.

If I am asked, "Are propositional attitudes real?" I will reply that the question is confused and ambiguous, and in consequence the answer must be multilevel. Insofar as language is real, our linguistic attributions of the propositional attitudes are real. Insofar as brains are real, there is a real basis for the sayings and doings and thinkings that are the ultimate grounds for attributing propositional

attitudes. Insofar as conscious thought is real, and insofar as some of our conscious thinking about ourselves or others is in terms of propositional attitudes, propositional attitudes are real. In that heaven which is reality there are many mansions, and propositional attitudes inhabit many of them. If that is not enough, you ask for too much reality.

The Disunity of the Self

Andrew Brennan

Introduction

My first brush with the topic of personal identity was in 1967. My supervisor at Calgary, Terry Penelhum, was active in the area at the time. He had just written a classic encyclopedia article on the topic—one that I recommend to anyone new to the area—and was working on a short book dealing with disembodied existence.¹ Rereading these pieces recently was a powerful reminder of his influence as a teacher and writer. Many of the ideas I have about the unity of persons, and think of as my own, are in fact due to him. Even my unwillingness to ditch the notorious “closest continuer” theory of identity can probably be traced to his own unwillingness to declare against it (although it does not figure under that label in his writings). So maybe it is time for a change of approach. What I will do in the present paper is to try to defend a position he regards as contradictory. If I can do so with only a fraction of his customary incisiveness and lucidity, I will be more than happy.

Penelhum writes:

I can attach no sense to the notion of “loose” or unowned experiences (or agentless actions). When I feel partially able to grasp the sense of the notion of a sensation that no one has, or an act that no one performs, I immediately reject the notion as flagrantly self-contradictory.²

1. “Personal Identity,” in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. 6, ed. P. Edwards (New York: Macmillan/Free Press, 1967), and *Survival and Disembodied Existence* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970).

2. *Survival and Disembodied Existence*, 71.

I want to challenge the idea that there is anything odd or senseless about the idea of unowned experience. This is part of a larger project that defends the idea of persons as psychologically unified organisms and does so by appeal to a modern version of Hume's bundle theory. A corollary of the position I adopt is that personal unity may be a matter of degree and that we sometimes expect too much by way of changelessness in the history of a person. A human life is sometimes a succession of related (and not-so-related) stories rather than the unfolding of one story.

Forms of Disunity

Elsewhere I have argued that the lives of some neurologically damaged subjects give insight into what it would be like for series of actions and experiences to fail to cohere into a single unified life.³ I will not here repeat the details of that argument, but instead fill out some collateral ideas. One of the most important of these concerns the distinction between what we might call the "higher" level and "lower" level facts about human psychology. We can start to get an idea of what the distinction involves if we consider a range of neuro-psychological breakdowns.

Consider, first of all, amnesia—a case much loved by philosophers writing about identity, but seldom studied in much depth. There are, in fact, many forms of amnesia, and they each raise particular problems for the unity theorist. Let us imagine, though, a form in which what has happened is that the subject's psychological mechanisms no longer function normally in respect of *retrieving* information about some portions of the subject's past. There is a period of the past, let us suppose, during which information was entered and encoded appropriately, but the subject no longer has access to that material, even though there is normal access to material processed both before and after the problematic segment.

The retrieval problem just imagined does not, it seems to me, threaten our conception of the subject in question as living a unified life. What has happened is that conscious access to part of that life has been denied owing to some neurological mishap. If we think of human psychology in causal terms, then the story I have just given is compatible with causal connectedness from one moment to the next

³. "Fragmented Selves and the Problem of Ownership," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 9 (1989–90): 143–58.

over the subject's life.⁴ Indeed, as a general fact about human life, our consciousness of what is happening at present and our ability to relate this to a past and a projected future must depend on the interaction of very many systems that operate below the level of conscious access. Stark evidence of the existence of such subconscious systems comes from studies of temporal lobe amnesics, for example, where it has been demonstrated that skills can be built upon and developed through time even when the subject is completely unable to recall any past occasions when the skills were practised.⁵

An obvious point about the continuous development of skills by temporal lobe amnesics is that this is only apparent to others. Perhaps it is not surprising that a causally integrated system with conscious access to some of its states can easily fail to have access to many other of its states. What is striking about the temporal lobe amnesic is the failure of memory access to states to which undamaged people normally do have access. But what must be true about all of us is that the access we enjoy to our pasts via memory, like our ability to reflect on our hopes, fears, desires, and all the other riches of consciousness, is supported by happenings to which we lack any kind of conscious access.

The latter happenings are what we could call *low-level* features of human psychology. Philosophers of mind, and theorists of personal identity are usually concerned, by contrast, only with *high-level* features such as memory, belief, intention, desire, and ambition. It is Locke's emphasis on co-consciousness as a criterion of personal unity that makes it hard for any Lockean to deal with the phenomenon of amnesia, and to give an account of amnesia as a feature (among others) of a broader, continuing life. Locke's problem resurfaces in modern philosophers influenced by the notion of co-consciousness. Thus, for example, Derek Parfit's conception of *psychological connectedness* is Locke's old notion under another name. It turns out that,

⁴. As Harold Noonan points out in a recent book, Leibniz is sensitive to the fact that episodes in our lives can be psychologically connected, and hence part of unified lives, even though we fail to remember them. Noonan does not, however, spell out the important implications of Leibniz's view. See his *Personal Identity* (London: Routledge, 1989), chap. 3.

⁵. The classic investigation of temporal lobe amnesia is Susan Iversen's "Temporal Lobe Amnesia," in *Amnesia*, 2d ed., ed. C. M. Whitty and O. L. Zangwill (London: Butterworths, 1977).

for Parfit, amnesia cannot be clearly distinguished from branching.⁶ To save Parfit's position from an immediate reductio, an obvious move is to allow low-level unity as constitutive of personal identity.

Oddly enough, this is not the solution taken by most modern theorists. Following Parfit, for example, Noonan tries to make the Lockean position plausible by introducing psychological *continuity*. He argues that Locke's need to provide an account of personal identity that is neutral with respect to dualism while leaving open the possibility of resurrection after death is satisfied by allowing continuity of co-consciousness rather than direct connectedness.⁷ In answer to Butler's example of the general who is conscious of a brave act during his first campaign but has lost the memory of a childhood beating (although he had this last memory at the time of his first campaign), Noonan's Locke is able to argue as follows. The boy and the young officer are psychologically connected by co-consciousness, as are the young officer and the general. Hence, the boy and the general are, even if not directly connected in any psychological way, at least psychologically continuous with each other. Continuity here is simply the ancestral of the connectedness relation.

The appeal to psychological continuity does not strike me as convincing, for a very simple reason. What memory theorists seem to be after is connectedness over significant periods of time. If not, then an extreme version of amnesia in which the events of each day simply fade away irretrievably will satisfy Noonan's construal of Locke, even though many people (not just Lockeans) would wonder whether the experiences of such an amnesic subject add up to those of a unified life. The appeal to psychological continuity seems over-elaborate in such a case, since persistence of a single body would make sense of the identity claim. Locke himself, moreover, seems explicitly to rule out Noonan's interpretation when he states, "If it be possible for the same Man to have distinct incommunicable consciousness at different times, it is past doubt the same Man would at different times make different Persons."⁸

It may be that those who believe psychological continuity retains the spirit of Locke's treatment are led astray by a misleading anal-

⁶. See, for more detail on this issue, the discussion in chap. 9 of my *Conditions of Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

⁷. See Noonan, *Personal Identity*, chap. 3.

⁸. John Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. P. Nidditch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), II.xxvii.20.

ogy. Consider what we say about the supposed continuity of physical things. A living body and its organs, for example, may be held to exist continuously despite regular change in its cells. However, in cases where the *same* body persists, there will typically be major structural and functional invariances that persist throughout the change of cellular and other components. Even in pupation and moulting there is preservation of structure (sometimes accompanied by growth).⁹ The shedding of cells is thus not akin to the shedding of memories unless memory loss is accompanied by invariances of psychological structure. But as long as we are concerned with high-level features of human psychology, memories in their relations to intentions, beliefs, desires, preferences, and so on are plausible candidates for being just such structural elements. I conclude, therefore, that failures of high-level psychological connectedness will, according to the Lockean view, involve destruction of personal identity.

The way out of the problem may be, as suggested earlier, to allow “insensible” connectedness in the style of Leibniz to have some weight. In the *New Essays*, Leibniz puts forward a striking claim that the identity of a spiritual substance can be constituted by the interconnectedness and continuity of its insensible perceptions even in the absence of direct memory:

An immaterial. . . spirit cannot “be stripped of all” perception of its past existence. It retains impressions of everything which has previously happened to it, and it even has presentiments of everything which will happen to it; but these states of mind are mostly too minute to be distinguishable and for one to be aware of them, although they may perhaps grow one day.¹⁰

Leibniz backtracks almost immediately from the implications of this view, declaring that memory is never completely lost by any spiritual substance, but that “minute” and “indistinguishable” states of mind provide the seeds from which full memory may grow. To reinterpret his claims in my terms, a subject who retains previously learned skills, retains linguistic capacities, and can recognize objects in the environment displays *low-level* psychological connectedness with past states, even if these lie beyond reach of the subject’s own

⁹. For more detail on these cases, see chap. 6 of my *Conditions of Identity*.

¹⁰. *New Essays on Human Understanding*, trans. and ed. P. Remnant and J. Bennett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 236. The passage is quoted in chap. 3 of Noonan’s *Personal Identity*.

present awareness. It then follows that there are various possibilities of disunity. A subject with certain kinds of amnesia, but displaying low-level connectedness, leads a life that is disunified in a way that is strikingly different from one in which there are large failures of low-level connectedness as well. Indeed, for subjects in the latter situation (if there are any), any talk of their lives as a coherent narrative seems quite inapplicable.¹¹ Notice that it is not only the Lockean who would be sceptical about whether such patients are living single lives. I would argue that their case provides an example of a set of experiences and actions that are, in a sense, unowned: for there would be no persisting subject to whom all the members of the set could be referred.

My next task will be to show that such a “no-ownership” possibility is not as weird as it has sometimes been thought to be. But to conclude this section, I want to draw attention to a set of further disunities that are not much mentioned in the literature, but that need to be given some account in our theories of personal identity. It looks as if, in some cases, perhaps partly through choice, it is possible for a person to persist through a radical high-level transformation. When Robert Nozick suggests that our pasts constitute non-binding precedents for our present self-synthesis, he perhaps gives too little weight to the possibility of radical change.¹² For although he allows us a certain latitude in determining what is to be the “closest continuer” of a past self, it is not clear that the kinds of rupture induced by religious conversion or psychotherapy can be dealt with in a model, like his, that again puts most weight on high-level features of the person. After conversion, the reformed person may try to disown portions of the past, or come to terms with it by way of regarding certain remembered past actions as having been done by another. The metaphor of being “born again” abets this reconstrual of the past.

Conversion and therapy pose special problems for those in the tradition of Locke who operate with high-level accounts of unity. For it is the subject’s range of ambitions, intentions, reflections on self, and modes of deliberate self-creation that are most heavily modified by such dramatic changes. Although one possible way of speaking about such changes is to suggest that the converted person is no longer the same person we used to know, we can also make good sense of the idea that the one persisting person has undergone a

¹¹. See Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (London: Duckworth, 1981), chap. 15.

¹². Nozick, *Philosophical Explanations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981).

transformation. However much high-level change there is, there will be impressive low-level continuities that persist throughout the change—habits of speech, modes of attention, and so on. This means we need to be wary of how to interpret remarks like the following:

When I consider various cases in between commonplace survival and commonplace death, I find that what I mostly want in wanting survival is that my mental life should flow on. My present experiences, thoughts, beliefs, desires and traits of character should have appropriate future successors. . . . Change should be gradual rather than sudden, and (at least in some respects) there should not be too much change overall.¹³

What is meant by the “flowing on” of one’s mental life here? If it is low-level mental life to which Lewis is referring, then this flow is compatible with a great deal of high-level change overall. On the other hand, if the flow is at high level itself (as suggested by Lewis’s examples), then this will no doubt be supported by a great deal of low-level integration that is hidden from the subject.

Such low-level phenomena are not the only things hidden from subjects and overlooked by philosophical analysis. The definitive ecology of the person has still to be written. When it is attempted, such a project will have to take on board facts not only about human psychology but also about the physical and social settings within which our lives take place, and the negotiations of self that come about through transactions with other selves, not to mention the impacts of accident, luck, and biological hardwiring. An investigation of these manifold features is well beyond the scope of the present paper. Nonetheless, until some such investigations are attempted there is a real worry that many contemporary writers simply beg the question when setting out to investigate the topic of personal unity. Thus, Mark Johnston repeatedly informs us in one paper that persons can be reliably re-identified over time and that such a practice provides an unproblematic source of knowledge about personal unity over time.¹⁴ A study of neurological and psychiatric disorders, and reflection on the social context within which persons grow, mature, and seek various forms of development, seem to me to leave it open whether Johnston’s optimism can be justified.

¹³. David Lewis, “Survival and Identity,” in *Philosophical Papers*, vol. 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 55.

¹⁴. “Human Beings,” *Journal of Philosophy* 84 (1987).

Persons as Systems

A brief review of empirical possibilities of disunity may do little to convince the tough-minded analyst that personal identity could be mythic, let alone show that it makes sense to think of experiences as occurring loose or unowned. Even those who think of persons in primarily psychological terms will require, in addition, at least a sketchy model of what kind of thing a person may be. An ability to provide an explanatory classification of the disunities mentioned in the preceding section will be one of the basic tests of the model. The one I propose simply gives a new spin to Hume's original bundle theory of the self: let us call it the *systems* conception of the person. A system has possibilities of persisting through changes in subsystems, and of carrying out partial functioning even in the presence of damage to significant assemblies. System identity, certainly, is not a clear-cut matter, and the identity of components within systems is also problematic. Indeed, for those theorists who would maintain that personal identity depends to some extent on social role, there is an interesting parallel to be pursued; for any component of a psychological system likewise may be said to have its identity partly determined by its system role. The holism of the psychological is a reflection of this fact.

In the remainder of this paper I want to explore ways of overcoming what look like knockdown objections to the idea that a person is a psychological system. In so doing, and in elaborating the fundamentals of the systems conception, I hope to show that this conception can also give a plausible account of what might be going on in some cases of psychological disunity. For a bundle—or systems—theorist, there are two unity problems to be explored. There is, first, unity at a time (synchronic unity) and, second, unity through time (diachronic unity). The problems encountered in giving an account of these two unities are similar in some respects to the general problems facing systems theory. Notoriously, for example, it is easier for a biologist in the field to make a provisional identification of a woodland ecosystem than to define its precise membership conditions. Likewise, ecosystems are held to persist through fluctuations in their constituent populations, immigrations, and even species extinctions, although again it is extremely hard to give a theoretical account of systemic identity through time. Similar problems can be cited in the case of other systems (including political ones, Hume's own preferred analogy to the soul).

The fundamental problems facing the neo-Humean are sometimes described as being about "ownership," though I am not sure

that such a description is at all helpful. However, they are connected with issues such as whether impersonal experience is possible, and with the possibility of conceiving of experiences apart from the experiencing subject. They are also connected with the issue of the primitiveness of the person and the metaphysical dependency of the person, on the one hand, and on experience, thought, and agency, on the other. As Frege pointed out in his essay “The Thought”:

The sense impression I have of green exists only because of me; I am its bearer. It seems absurd to us that a pain, a mood, a wish should rove about the world without a bearer, independently. An experience is impossible without an experient. The inner world presupposes the person whose inner world it is.¹⁵

Those who think of the person as a system persisting over time are sometimes faced with the difficulty that their very mode of conceiving of the self forces them into the position Frege here describes as absurd or that Penelhum thinks to be senseless. If the person only comes on the scene, as it were, given a suitably connected sequence of bundles, each one in turn no more than an interconnected system of mental states, is not the modern bundle theorist committed to denying the following three supposed truths?

1. The experiences, beliefs, desires, and so on that are mine at this time are so united by belonging one and all to me, the person who has them.
2. There are no isolated thoughts, experiences, or other mental states (this is the holism of the mental).
3. The experiences and other mental states and happenings that are mine owe their particular character to being one and all mine; their individuation requires essential reference to me as their subject.

These claims will be taken as raising questions about *unity*, *isolation*, and *particularity*, respectively.

Why should the bundle theorist be taken as denying these claims? The arguments go like this. As far as isolation is concerned, the modern bundle theorist is committed to a *constructionist* picture. Suppose that at a given time I am no more than a structured

¹⁵. Trans. A.M. and Marcelle Quinton, *Mind* 65 (1956), reprinted in P.F. Strawson, ed., *Philosophical Logic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967).

collection of mental states and happenings, and over time I am constituted by a structured sequence of such collections. For it to be possible to construct a system, or bundle, the separate ingredients must be specifiable, and must be capable of existing apart from the system. Hence, they must be capable of occurring *singly*, like the individual coaches out of which a train is constructed.

The particularity issue, associated with the third claim above, likewise poses a problem of the separate individuation of each state, memory, pain, or desire that figures in the system that constitutes a person. How do we count token pains, for example, if not by counting persons, and operating with the principle that the identity of a given pain token is conceptually dependent on that of the person who has it?

Finally, the unity problem, raised by the first claim above, poses a specific issue for those who think of the person primarily in terms of the causal integration of numerous states and systems. For, it is argued, such causal integration will not be sufficient to make a set of experiences unified in the required sense. Rather, only the fact that all these causally interconnected experiences are had by one same person will suffice to establish their unity in a single self.

All three of the issues just identified raise what might be called a *metaphysical priority thesis*: the thesis that, in a straightforward way, persons are prior to their states, memories, actions, and behaviour.¹⁶ The priority thesis denies a certain view about the constitution of persons. If the constructionist or bundle theory were true, then there would apparently be thoughts, experiences, actions, and so on available to be collected into the histories of persons, just as coaches are available to be collected into trains. But underlying the three alleged truths articulated above is the inescapable fact that pains, actions, visual experiences, and the like can seemingly be individuated only *after* subjects of such items have themselves been individuated. So it seems that the metaphysical dependency is the other way round from what is required by the bundle theory.¹⁷

¹⁶. For a clear statement of the problems identified here see Peter Carruthers, *Introducing Persons* (London: Croom Helm, 1986).

¹⁷. Writers sometimes make much of the “adjectival” nature of attributing perceptions, thoughts, and the like to subjects. Thus, in Noonan, *Personal Identity*, John Cook is credited with having displayed the “flaw” in Hume’s reasoning by comparing thoughts to scratches. Just as scratches require there to be something scratched, so thoughts are said to require a subject to think them. The bundle theory, understood as a rudimentary systems theory, denies the appropriateness of any such comparison.

What I want to do is to dismantle these attacks on the bundle theory while doing justice to the claims of the priority thesis. So I will take the three issues in turn, showing how none poses a lethal problem for bundle theorists. This is good news for functionalists and for neo-empiricist theories of the person. Even so, it leaves a large number of problems about personal identity unresolved.

Unity

In his original treatment of the self as “a system of different perceptions or different existences, which are link’d together by the relation of cause and effect,” Hume regarded the bundle as tied together by relations of resemblance and causality.¹⁸ However much plausibility this idea may have when applied to diachronic unity, it faces a difficulty, as modern writers have pointed out, when applied to synchronic unity. As Barry Stroud has observed:

When I am having an impression of a tree I might turn my head and get an impression of a building, but the first impression is not a cause of the second. The first does not belong to a class of perceptions each of which has been followed by a member of a class of perceptions to which the second impression belongs.¹⁹

The second sentence refers to Hume’s constant conjunction account of causality; but even if we have a suitable account of singular causation, the difficulty remains. Unity at a time does not seem to involve one perception causing another, nor need it involve any awareness, at the time, that a number of my states are occurring simultaneously. For example, at the theatre I may be seeing and hearing things simultaneously; but the seeing does not cause the hearing, or vice versa, and I may have no awareness that the seeing is simultaneous with the hearing.

It would be premature to conclude from these facts alone that the bundle theory is false. Consider, for example, another kind of system, an environmental one. At a given time, decomposers may be busy on the output from part of an ecosystem—say, leaf litter, or the drop-

Hume’s perceptions are components in the psychological bundle, and hence distinguishable from the bundle in a way that scratches cannot be distinguished from things scratched. See J. Cook, “Hume’s Scepticism with Regard to the Senses,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 5 (1968).

¹⁸. *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge and P.H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 261.

¹⁹. *Hume* (London: Routledge, 1977), 126.

pings of grazing animals. Meanwhile, a large predator is about to launch an attack on a grazing animal. But the predator is not doing anything at the moment of attack that links it directly with any of the fungi or micro-organisms that form a major part of the decomposer portion of the system. The failure of direct causal connection at a time among various system components does not undermine the claim that the various components fit together in a system mediating the cycling of matter and use of energy. The interchanges *over time* among the various compartments of the system reveal it to be a causally integrated coherent structure to which a certain number of inputs can be referred, and which operates on these inputs in order to produce the systemic outputs.

By contrast, resemblance cannot be used as a means of connecting systemic items together either directly or indirectly. Crows do not resemble earthworms very much, either in appearance or in behaviour, even if a given ecosystem contains both crows and worms as components. Carbon, nitrogen, and other elements will also belong in the inventory of terrestrial ecosystems, but they bear no resemblance either to each other or to their fellow system members (except in the question-begging way of being similar through belonging to the same system). Resemblance, then, should be dropped as a candidate for cementing system components into an integrated whole.

Conceived as cognitive, action-originating, and experiencing systems, persons are structures that process a certain number of inputs according to the principles governing the system, and generate corresponding outputs. A person, thus conceived, is a nested structure of systems within systems, and we so far have only the faintest glimmerings of how the various components communicate with each other and maintain homeostasis both overall and within the component systems. But nothing in the systems stance requires that unity of the whole amount to direct causal dependency of the behaviour of one part at a time on some—or all—of the other parts. We should not expect a system as complex as the person to show any higher degree of causal unity at a time than we find in other kinds of system.

To forestall any possible misunderstandings, it should be noted that the neo-empiricist need not take the loose causal unity of the person as involving any commitment to the thesis that complex experiences are themselves complexes of experiences. A variant of this view is found clearly in the classic empiricists. For example, Hume apparently considers a complex idea to be a complex whose ingredi-

ents are themselves ideas.²⁰ Although the systems view involves the idea that lower-level systems are nested within higher-level ones, this carries no general commitment to the classical view of experience.

Any plausible systems view will make clear the different degrees of causal integration among a person's subsystems. For example, it is highly probable that the unity of perception at a time is supported by a higher degree of underlying causal integration than the unity of perception with other sensory modalities. Conceptually, this is shown by the fact that we can imagine having the same visual experience at a time accompanied by a quite different auditory experience from the one in fact accompanying it. However, suppose that some element in my visual experience at a time is changed (instead of having an experience of my friend wearing a red hat, I have one of my friend wearing a green hat). In this case, the visual experience is not the same one with a change of element. Rather, change of element means difference of experience.

So, a complex experience at a time will be a complex of experiences of different modalities: this much we can cede to the classical empiricist view. But within each modality, a complex (visual, auditory, etc.) experience will not be a complex of experiences at all. These distinct kinds of functional integration are likely also to have separate underlying neurological implementations. For example, the integration of experience within a single sensory modality may be associated with closely integrated neural processing within a single brain area, while the looser causal integration of experiences belonging to different modalities may be associated with mapping from the separate brain areas to other areas whose functional roles are those of a Cartesian *sensus communis*. So indeed it proves to be.²¹

It is hard to see how to accommodate these observations in any account apart from the systems view. The overall synchronic unity of a person seems to involve less by way of tight causal integration than does the unity of a single modality at a time. But the absence of resemblance or direct causal connections among the various states, ex-

²⁰. "Thus we find, that all simple ideas and impressions resemble each other; and as the complex are formed from them, we may affirm in general, that these two species of perception are exactly correspondent" (*Treatise* I.i.1, 4).

²¹. Although in making this claim I undoubtedly oversimplify. See articles on the nervous system and localization of brain function in R. L. Gregory, ed., *The Oxford Companion to the Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

perienings, and so on that are present in me at a given time in no way undermines the claim that I am a causally integrated, functional system. Instead, the potential for systemically mediated causal interaction between different items within a single system is compatible with those items' failing to enter into direct causal relations with each other at any specific time.

Isolation

Even if I can possess synchronic unity as a psychological system in the absence of direct causal connections at any given time between my doings, thinkings, and experiences in different modalities, it might be objected that I can hardly be constructed solely out of such things: for if I am constructed out of such psychological ingredients, they must, like the planks of a boat or the bricks of a house, be capable of occurring singly. Two widely accepted holisms seem to count against the possibility that isolated thoughts, experiences, or even sensations can exist.

First, there is the holism of *meaning*. If my thoughts, or my experiences, are to have content, then this content must be expressible in a system of signs, each of which does not have meaning in isolation but rather derives its sense from contrasts and relations with other signs.

Related to the holism of sense or meaning is the holism of the *mental*. Conceptual capacities involve networks of concepts, we might argue, and if the content of certain experiences involves the concept of the (at least putatively) experienced object, then experiences will not be the sorts of things that come singly at all. Reference to the content of an experience, then, will typically involve dependence on meanings and systems of signs, and the content itself will be what it is only by connection and comparison with a class of other experiences and mental happenings.

An obvious reply to this attack on the bundle theory is to query the notion that a constructionist account of the self inevitably presupposes the possibility of singular conscious and sensational states. For other systems there are similar difficulties about conceiving of their components occurring singly, but these problems do not prompt any deep metaphysical concern on our part. There cannot be predators, for example, without prey: even those creatures of solitary habits, like the eagle and other large raptors, owe their ecological (that is, systemic) properties to their nesting—so to speak—within larger systems. Likewise, there can no doubt be isolated neural

happenings; but whether these happenings constitute the stuff of experience depends, I conjecture, on both their linkage to other neural happenings and their connections with the initiation of action.

Of special help here is an analogy with games. Can we make sense of the moves of a game occurring singly, that is, outside the context of a given game? The movement of a piece across a board may or may not be a move in a game, depending on the existence or not of other moves of that and other pieces. But even if moves do not occur outside games, this does not mean that a game is not constituted by a series of moves. On the contrary, there seems little pressure towards anti-reductionism about games. If there are only moves in the context of games, or at least parts of games, this still does not show that the game is some kind of mysterious substance in which the moves all inhere. No more need the ecology of experience and other states force either the classical or the modern Humean into a theory of the person as a substance of which experience is an attribute.

There is a great deal more, however, to be said about the priority thesis in connection with the example of games. The game analogy is particularly helpful in illustrating what is plausible in contemporary functionalism. For the purposes of the present section, though, the analogy has simply been used to establish that the systems theorist has a plausible response to the isolation objection.

Particularity

Can pains, other experiences, and emotional and action-initiating states be identified other than “as elements within relatively well-integrated mental economies—that is, as parts of the mental lives of subjects”?²² If bundle theorists are forced to maintain that the individuation of pains and the rest is independent of the individuation of their subjects, then it looks, yet again, as if they are getting the metaphysical dependency back to front.

In the paper just quoted, Jonathan Lowe goes on to argue against a procedure outlined by Christopher Peacocke.²³ Peacocke suggests that it may be possible for a single patient to be constituted by two separate subjects. For example, suppose that severing the

²². The quotation is from Jonathan Lowe, “Real Selves: Persons as Substantial Kinds” (Paper delivered at the Royal Institute of Philosophy Conference on Human Beings, Lampeter, 1990).

²³. In Christopher Peacocke, *Sense and Content* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 176ff.

connections between the two halves of the brain means that an olfactory experience caused by the stimulation of one nostril is causally separated from a qualitatively similar experience caused by the stimulation of the other nostril. Then, as a result of the causal separation of the two experiences, and their separate connections with other states, we might argue that there are *two* token experiences here, and *therefore* that there are two subjects of experience coexisting in a single body.

Peacocke's argument seems to be the sort of which a neo-Humean might approve. The identity of the subject or subjects of experience is made to depend on the prior individuation of experiences and allocation of them, on account of their causal connections, to appropriate streams. Lowe's reply is that the argument is fatally flawed because the question whether a stimulation results in an olfactory experience is answerable only in the light of information concerning the prospective subject of the experience. Stimulations of sense organs will only result in sensations, after all, if the subject is awake and still possesses appropriate sensory capacities (and the latter could very well be in doubt after surgical interference with the brain). So in the very mention of experiences Peacocke presupposes the existence of a subject (complete with functioning senses and a range of further capacities and states).

There is something fundamentally right about Lowe's objection here; but to see what it is, is not easy. The basic puzzle facing us is that it seems there really cannot be token experiences (and other states) separate from, indeed prior to, those psychological systems that we count as persons. But if there really cannot be such isolated tokens, then how on earth can persons be constructions out of experiences and other states?

A parallel puzzle arises for what we might call the constructionist theory of games. A board game is, from one point of view, no more than a sequence of physical happenings: pieces are moved from one position to others and sometimes are removed from the board altogether. Provided the game is a legal one, these moves and removals will be in accordance with the rules of the game (at least for the most part). What more is there to a game, then, than a lawful sequence of token moves?

We need to be clear here about the vocabulary of "types" and "tokens." Such terms best suit the description of physical instances of (abstract) patterns. Any actual move of a piece on one particular occasion is a token in the sense that it is an instance of a legal move. But what is the set of legal moves? One way of thinking of this is as

none other than all the possible moves in all possible games of the kind in question.

So, any actual game (taking place at a certain time and involving a certain sequence of token moves) is one instance of the set of all possible games, and a token move (within an actual game) is simply an instance of part of a game (conceived abstractly). Moving a piece (legally) on the board on a particular occasion of play could be regarded as selecting a subset of all the possible games (namely, those in which that move occurs).

What, then, is a token game? It is constituted by a sequence of physical movements, we could say, that exemplify a lawful game structure: and token games are, in a sense, no more than this. Although such a claim makes reference to “laws” and “structure,” it does not thereby import any new ontological commitments. But then suppose that a person-token is a sequence of happenings that exemplify the lawful, causal integration of a cognitive, perceptual, and action-initiating system. Metaphysically, person-tokens may be no more than this, and experiences no more than happenings exemplifying parts of possible lives.

This can all perhaps be put more clearly if we allow Lowe’s claim as a first approximation to the truth: namely, there cannot be token experiences occurring prior to, or independent of, the lives of persons. Likewise, in the case of a game, there cannot be token moves except as the physical realization of something more abstract. Now, if token moves are not independent of games, how can we give a constructionist account of games?

The answer here is that the physical movements of pieces on boards on specific occasions may well be independent of, and separate from, games. After all, pieces are moved for dusting, or as the result of idle toying. But such physical movements of the pieces are not token moves of any game unless they are nested in some larger structure. Likewise, there can be neural events and functional states that occur separately from personal experiences. Foetuses probably, and babies certainly, will be the subjects of happenings that fail to constitute experiences, even though qualitatively similar happenings, nested in other sequences of events, may well constitute experiences.

What has been sketched here is far too simple. Consider, for example, the problem posed by portions of games. Games can be started and then left off; or a particular portion of a game can be played without the rest. What starts as a random toying with the pieces on the board (nothing more than an independent sequence of physical movements) can turn into a game, of which the earlier movements

are retrospectively deemed to be the opening moves. There will thus be occasions when it is hard to decide whether token moves have occurred, or whether something less significant than that has happened. Likewise, there will be sets of neural and quasi-cognitive happenings that occur in association with a single human body and brain that may well leave us puzzled. We may not know whether we have witnessed part of a life, or whether indeed anything properly called “experience” has occurred. In the case of the subjects, discussed earlier, suffering from both high- and low-level disintegration, we may well be legitimately puzzled about whether experiences have in fact occurred.

It turns out, then, that both Lowe and Peacocke are correct in their claims. Lowe is right to query whether physical happenings constitute experiences. But his concern is analogous to wondering whether movements of pieces on a board constitute moves in a game. Peacocke is right in maintaining the importance of their causes and effects to the individuation of experiences. For lives, like games, have a structure within which mental states and happenings have a place, and their identity is bound up with that very place.

It follows that experiences are in a way dependent on the larger, structured whole within which they occur. But this truism is not one into which it is safe to read very much. In particular, it has no ontological consequences about persons as psychological substances. For the person, viewed as a functional system, is supported ultimately by the physical stuff of neural and bodily occurrences. And these occurrences, considered as akin to physical movements, are what they are independent of the larger functional context. What makes mere physical happenings the stuff of experience and desire, agency and contemplation? To answer this question we have to appeal to structures and patterns, laws and rules, causal integration and the duality of types and tokens. None of this, however, requires the reification of the person as a metaphysically primary substance, nor does it deny the reducibility of the person to a sequence of constitutive elements.

Afterword

The systems conception gives an account of the person as a psychological “bundle” that makes sense of the claims made previously about amnesia. Failures in the system’s own ability to track portions of its past will not be lethal to its persistence as long as the causal integration of many of its subsystems is unaffected. Deep failures of causal integration, by contrast, give rise to a more puzzling situation.

Things happen that look like experiences yet fail of appropriate causal connections with other parts of the system. The systems conception on its own does not explain our puzzlement here. But attention to the analogy with games, and to the relation of abstract structure to concrete instantiation, helps us to see what might be going on.

On these counts, the systems theory looks plausible and capable of satisfying the conditions of a decent theory of the person. It is less clear what to say about disunities of the sort brought about by conversion or therapy. Part of the problem here is the unresolved issue concerning high- versus low-level conceptions of the self. For Locke and those who follow him, there is a clear distinction between the highly integrated, complex conscious systems typical of human beings and other advanced animals and those that exhibit the degree of co-consciousness required of persons. According to my reading of Locke, his is not simply a psychological, as opposed to a physical, account of personhood. Rather, he puts special constraints on the concept so that even psychological connectedness over time is not sufficient for unity unless that connectedness is of a very special sort.²⁴

Systems come in tighter and looser forms: this is clear in the case of terrestrial ecosystems, some of which are such loose assemblages of species populations that sceptical biologists doubt if they deserve the title “system” at all. Persons as psychological bundles also, I suggest, come in more and less tightly integrated patterns. The system’s capacity for self-modification, and the effect of various external impacts, will also vary from one person to another. Here, I conjecture, is room for taking account of some of the vagaries of human existence; whereas a single set of subsystems (a well-defined complex of beliefs, desires, and associated low-level components) may figure prominently in the history of one individual, in another there may be dominance by different ones at different times or unresolved competition among several. Lives can thus take different forms, and some will display far more change than others.

I have not so far made clear whether psychological systems depend on, or are the same as, physical ones. My intention has been to

²⁴. According to my interpretation, the Lockean may count the memory claims of those who have been “born again” as claims to *quasi-remember*, if there is sufficient lack of other high-level connectedness between the pre- and the post-conversion person. See Sydney Shoemaker, “Persons and Their Pasts,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 7 (1970) for an account of quasi-memory.

give an account that is compatible with physicalism. The notion of a physical happening, however, is not particularly well defined; so it is probably safe to describe the theory outlined in this paper as a token identity theory in the sense that certain physical happenings are tokens or instances of experiences and other events in the lives of persons. Although it is reductionist, the theory is not thereby committed to reductive (or eliminative) physicalism about persons or to any particular account of what the functional items are in a functionalist theory of the mind. The theory is also silent on the nature of the contents of experience. The individuation of content is a topic that lies beyond the scope of the present sketch, but clearly the systems conception is open to both “narrow” and “broad” construals of content. The theory should appeal, therefore, to theorists of many different persuasions.

That said, the game analogy is nonetheless a powerful reminder of the importance of recognizing what Bernard Williams has called our “deeply body-based” situation as persons.²⁵ Although my primary focus has been the person conceived as a psychological unity, I have given no account of persons as psychological entities. I am doubtful if persons can change bodies, be held in computers, or even go where all (or parts) of their brains go, although the systems theory rules none of this out as unintelligible. But in the form given here, the systems theory imports no ontology beyond the physical. So perhaps I have not broken so completely with Penelhum’s own view as I promised at the outset. As he pointed out about the memory criterion: “A memory of an experience, even a true one, is not just one more experience, but a manner of knowing one’s own past. . . . Memory is essentially a parasitic phenomenon, and needs a body to feed on.”²⁶ Just so with psychological states in general: persons as psychological systems are also parasitic on the physical systems in which their lives are tokened.²⁷

²⁵. See *Problems of the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973).

²⁶. *Survival and Disembodied Existence*, 75–76.

²⁷. Many colleagues have contributed to the final shape of this paper, including Jonathan Lowe, Cynthia MacDonald, Alan Millar, and Timothy Sprigge, to all of whom I am extremely grateful.

Gappiness and Personal Identity

R. T. Herbert

Speaking of “identity in general,” Thomas Reid claims that it “supposes an uninterrupted continuance of existence.” He supports this impressively by what he says next: “That which hath ceased to exist cannot be the same with that which afterwards begins to exist, for this would be to suppose a being to exist after it ceases to exist, and to have had existence before it was produced, which are manifest contradictions. Continued uninterrupted existence is therefore necessarily implied in identity.”¹

Reid’s argument seems easily exemplified. A lakefront cabin is built on the site of one destroyed earlier by fire. The destroyed cabin is not the same one as the present cabin. To be the same one, (1) it would have to remain even though it has burned to the ground, and (2) the present cabin would already have to have been in place before being built. Since (1) and (2) are or imply manifest contradictions it seems that, for such “beings” as cabins at any rate, a judgement of numerical identity over time implies the being’s continued uninterrupted existence during the period the judgement concerns. The judgement “This old building is the cabin where I spent happy summers as a boy” appears to imply the cabin’s continued uninterrupted existence through the intervening years.

Reid makes it clear that he means this doctrine to apply to himself, maintaining that his thesis concerning identity in general finds no exception in personal identity. “My personal identity,” he writes, “implies the *continued* existence of that . . . thing which I call myself.”²

1. *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, ed. and abridged A.D. Woozley (London: Macmillan, 1941), 202.

2. *Ibid.*, 203, emphasis added. It is perhaps worth noticing that John Locke, with some of whose views on personal identity Reid is in well-known disagreement, holds a

Compelling though the doctrine seems, questions arise: What kinds of beings does the doctrine apply to; or, in other words, how much can Reid's phrase "identity in general" rightly be thought to embrace? Is it really a manifest contradiction "to suppose a being to exist after it ceased to exist" or "to have had existence before it was produced"? What counts as ceasing to exist, as beginning to exist, as continued uninterrupted existence?

Pursuing the question of the doctrine's scope, let us consider its possible application to our pains. Can a pain—for example, a headache—that a person is now suffering be the same one that person had yesterday? Reid himself answers negatively (that "the pain felt this day is not the same individual pain which I felt yesterday"³) without bothering to consider if the sufferer was able to gain relief in a few hours' sleep. One would expect Reid to hold that if the sufferer suffered without surcease through the night, his headache today is the same one he had yesterday. Instead, Reid denies that "identity in its proper sense" applies to our pains at all.⁴

What this denial comes to is not clear. If it means that affirmations of identity over time of such entities as headaches are unintelligible, this seems mistaken. Affirming that one still has the same headache would surely make sense in certain circumstances. On the other hand, if Reid's denial means that, though intelligible, these affirmations do not necessarily imply continued uninterrupted existence, the claim is a bit perplexing. There seem to be cases in which interruption of a headache amounts to termination followed by another headache ("No: the headache I had yesterday went away; today I'm paying the piper for last night's carouse") and, on the other hand, cases in which interruption is simply not taken into account—cases in which a few hours' fitful sleep, for instance, supports no objection to the affirmation that "I've had this same headache for days." Thus, the claim that affirmations of the identity over time of headaches do not imply continued uninterrupted existence seems incorrect about some cases, although correct about others.

One might attempt to enlist the claim's use of the word "existence" to mount the objection that headaches *exist* only as or while they are felt, with the consequence that the same headache

position virtually identical to Reid's regarding continued existence. See Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. John W. Yolton (London: Dent, 1965), II.xxvii.29.

³. Reid, *Essays*, 202.

⁴. Ibid. Like Locke, Reid appears to take the muddled view that a thought (in Locke's phrase) perishes "the moment it begins," so that it can have no identity over time (see Locke, *Essay*, II.xxvii.2).

lasting for days is really a series of individual headaches. But this ignores the fact that a *single* headache might consist of periods of intense suffering relieved by brief episodes of sleep, thus allowing it to exist even while not being felt—that with regard to their identity over time, though some headaches (in their existence) are comparable to a spell of feverishness, in which no interruption is possible, others (in their existence) are like a case of intermittent fever, which of course includes interruptions in feverishness.

Supposing, then, that some headaches are indeed interruption-inclusive, let us ask whether these falsify the doctrine that identity “supposes an uninterrupted continuance of existence.” One response might be that they do falsify it because, though their existence is interrupted, their identity over time remains unaffected. It may be objected, however, that from a headache’s being intermittent it does not follow that the headache’s existence is interrupted, any more than from one’s illness’s being intermittent fever it follows that the illness’s existence is interrupted. Cases of such headaches and such fevers seem to support rather than falsify the doctrine that identity supposes an uninterrupted continuance of existence. The existence of a case of intermittent fever, for example, has “uninterrupted continuance” at least as surely as the existence of a cabin or of a human being.

Indeed, in the intermittent, interruption of existence seems quite inconceivable, as it does also in the intermissive. A twenty-minute intermission following the performance of the first act of a two-act play yields no reason to identify what follows the intermission as another performance. The play’s performance includes, and thus its existence persists through, the intermission or interruption.⁵

It seems, then, that Reid’s doctrine applies to cases that at first might appear to be outside its scope. But such cases may be only what Locke referred to as “modes,” the term (along with “relation”) he applied to all things other than substances.⁶ If the identity of modes like intermittent fever and headache and intermissive performance “supposes an uninterrupted continuance of existence,” what about substances like lakefront cabins and their owners, shoes and ships, cabbages and kings?

Perhaps the answer that the identity of substances, too, involves the same supposition is obvious. If this is the same cabin I summered

⁵. For further discussion of the intermissive see my *Paradox and Identity in Theology* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979), 131–32.

⁶. Locke, *Essay*, II.xxvii.2.

at as a boy, it has continued to exist from that day to this; if this is the same head of cabbage you bought three days ago, your purchase was not sliced up for slaw and eaten. Also obversely: if that earlier cabin ceased to exist, this is not the same one I summered at, and if the cabbage you bought was eaten, this one is not that same head. It seems that the identity of substances, like that of modes, supposes uninterrupted continuance of existence.

Here the general form of our central question arises. Though it is clear that Reid's doctrine applies to substances (without exception, let us suppose), can there be a substance whose existence, though it has uninterrupted continuance, nevertheless accommodates a hiatus, a break, a lacuna, a gap—as there are modes whose continued uninterrupted existence accommodates intermittence or intermission? An affirmative answer to this would mean that the substance's identity would remain unaffected by the gap since, being gap-inclusive, the substance's existence would continue uninterrupted by it.

To explore this question, let us consider the case of a mythical substance, the phoenix. This bird of wonder, as Shakespeare called it, after living for some five hundred years, burns itself up and then rises from its ashes with renewed vigour to live through another long period of life. Do we have here the case of a substance whose existence continues uninterrupted? One may wish to answer negatively, for the case appears to be like that of a cabin destroyed by fire, with a cabin then built in its place—the case of a substance's ceasing to exist, followed by a substance's coming to exist. To those taking this view it will make no difference that the phoenix is said to rise from its own ashes, whereas the post-fire cabin certainly does not, for they will see the reduction to ashes of any substance, mythical or real, as its ceasing to exist. They will insist that in the phoenix we do not have the case of a substance whose existence continues through a gap of death and dissolution. And unless they abandon the doctrine that “identity supposes uninterrupted continuance of existence,” they will be prepared to add that we have, instead, the case of two substances, the existence of one ending in fire, that of the other beginning in ashes—“the phoenix” being not one bird having a singular existence that persists through dissolution, but rather a series of birds, perhaps with a unique means of producing offspring.

This is not the modern conception of the phoenix. The modern conception is indeed that of one bird whose existence spans its incineration and subsequent rising, a substance whose uninterrupted continuance of existence accommodates a gap of death and dissolution.

A tough-minded objection to this conception, however, is that mythical substances do not yield reliable lessons concerning real

substances. Fantasies employing the literary device of time travel entertain by inducing a suspension of disbelief in something that is actually conceptually incoherent. Similarly, “the phoenix” is a case of disguised nonsense that would charm the beholder into buying the incoherent notion that a substance’s existence can continue after it ceases, by getting him to ignore the truth that a substance’s dissolution *ends* its existence.

The crux of this objection is the last-mentioned “truth” that a substance’s dissolution ends the substance’s existence. This seems to be borne out in the following conversation about a real substance imagined by Peter van Inwagen.⁷ “‘Is that the house of blocks your daughter built this morning?’ ‘No, I built this one after I accidentally knocked hers down. I put all the blocks just where she did, though. Don’t tell her.’” Van Inwagen’s point is that if substance *x* is assembled from its elements by one person and substance *y* (not assumed numerically different from substance *x*) is assembled from the same elements in the same order by another person, substance *x* and substance *y* are not numerically identical; so, though van Inwagen ever so carefully places each block in the same position it had before, his house and his daughter’s are not the same one because they were not made by the same person.

Van Inwagen’s imagined conversation also seems to illustrate my objector’s “truth” that the dissolution of a substance terminates its existence. In accidentally knocking down his daughter’s house of blocks, van Inwagen accomplishes its dissolution into its elements, terminating its existence—in consequence of which his careful duplication can only bring to exist a numerically different structure, a new house of blocks.

Let us allow that in knocking down his daughter’s house van Inwagen ends its existence. It may seem, then, that what is true of the girl’s house of blocks is true of any real substance: its dissolution ends its existence. It may seem that my objector’s “truth” is indeed true, and true of all real substances.

Consider, however, the case of a stage set that is disassembled for removal to the next town, where it is reassembled for the next performance. The set may be such that, in being struck, it is as clearly reduced to its elements as the girl’s house of blocks is; so if the latter is a case of the dissolution of a substance, the former must be also. But is dismantling such a set terminating its existence? No; it

⁷. “The Possibility of Resurrection,” *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* 9 (1978): 118.

continues to exist, struck to its elements and packed away, ready for shipment to Drumheller. Many cases illustrate this logic: a machine disassembled to its simplest parts for cleaning and then reassembled, illegal weapons completely stripped down for secret transport and later put together again, and so on. In each case, existence continues uninterrupted by a period of dissolution. Each yields the same lesson: “The dissolution of a substance ends its existence” is not universally true.

It may be objected, however, that these cases do not involve thorough dissolution, the resulting elements being insufficiently simple. If the stage set were burned to ashes rather than struck, the machine and the weapons melted down rather than disassembled, then their dissolution would end their existence.

The point is well taken. The set’s reduction to ashes, the machine’s to molten metal, is a dissolution that terminates the existence of these substances. But even when dissolution is understood to be thorough in this way, it is not clear that these cases teach a universal truth. Specifically, there is the bothersome phoenix, whose continued existence seems to accommodate a dissolution as thorough as the incinerated stage set’s. One may wish to insist that our conception of the phoenix is such that, however thorough the bird’s dissolution in flames, its existence is not terminated.

But how is this to be understood? Does it mean that the bird’s existence continues in the form of ashes—as the dismantled stage set’s existence continues in the form of elements packed up for shipment? No; this won’t do, of course. Substances reduced to ashes do not continue to exist as ashes, and so if a substance reduced to ashes does perchance continue to exist, it does not do so as ashes. The myth describes the phoenix as rising from its ashes. This might be taken to indicate that the ashes form up as the bird, suggesting to an incautious reader that they must somehow be a phase of its existence, so that, when it was incinerated, the phoenix continued to exist as its ashes. The phrase is better understood as indicating that the bird materializes on its ashes to live anew, a process that leaves the ashes untransmogrified and the reader free of a nonsensical thought. It is true that one may visualize ashes changing into bird without inferring that the bird had existed as those ashes, but the temptation to infer it is there. Let us not think that after incineration the phoenix continues to exist as an ash pile. To avoid temptation, let us think that during its existence the phoenix repeatedly rises to life, leaving countless piles of its ashes like so many abandoned nests.

But if it is nonsense to say that a substance reduced to ashes continues to exist as ashes, there seems little hope of understanding

the idea that the incinerated phoenix continues to exist, or that its dissolution does not end its existence. If the phoenix's "continuing to exist as ashes" will not do, then, since nothing but ashes remain, no mode of existence seems available in terms of which understanding is possible.

To investigate this, let us consider again the case of a "temporal entity": specifically, a performance of a two-act play whose acts are separated by a twenty-minute intermission. During the intermission nothing is happening on stage; the actors are in their dressing rooms, the house lights are up, the stage is dark, the curtain lowered, the audience milling in the lobby. But if someone asks whether the performance is in progress, the correct response may be, "Yes, it is," for the questioner may not be asking whether the performance is presently in intermission, but whether it has begun, or has not concluded. With this fact about the logic of intermissive temporal entities, one can generate an artificial perplexity that helpfully mirrors our difficulty concerning the phoenix: An artificial philosopher complains, "If the performance of act one has just concluded, nothing is going on in terms of which it is possible to understand the foregoing affirmation. Asserting that the performance of the play is in progress, while acknowledging the empty stage, the lowered curtain, and so on, is surely to make a pronouncement that is, after all, unintelligible." If one now seeks to remedy this "difficulty" by looking for some activity that the first act's performance (despite having concluded) *continues as* in order to account for the fact that the play's performance is in progress, one will of course be barking up the wrong tree. The absence of activity on stage constitutes no reason to deny the present existence of that temporal entity; it is, at least in part, what constitutes the entity's intermissiveness.

These considerations suggest a response to one who sees no hope of making sense of the phoenix. That person sees no possibility of understanding that the bird's incineration does not terminate its existence, for following its death nothing remains for it to exist as. The response suggested is that to suppose that something must remain for it to exist as is to impose the wrong sort of requirement. It is like the artificial philosopher's requirement that there be some activity that the first act's (concluded) performance continues as, if the play's performance is in progress. In this case the *right* sort of requirement derives from the concept of a temporal entity that is intermission-inclusive. Deriving the requirement amounts only to gaining a clear recognition (1) of intermission-including temporal entities such as, for example, certain dramatic, musical, and athletic performances, and (2) of the fact that the *differing* logic of intermission-excluding

temporal entities (e.g., performances of one-act plays) should not be imposed on them. With this two-fold recognition, one sees there is nothing perplexing in the notion of a temporal entity whose existence continues uninterrupted by its twenty-minute intermission, for one is free of the inclination to seek (but fail to find) the gap-filling activity required by that differing logic.

To one perplexed by the phoenix because there seems no possibility of understanding that the bird's incineration does not terminate its existence, the response might now continue thus: "You are labouring under the illusory requirement of a logic of substances that is alien to the case of the phoenix. That is, you are supposing the necessity of (and so look for and fail to find) something remaining after incineration for the phoenix to exist as, because you do not acknowledge the notion of a mythical bird of wonder whose existence spans many deaths and incinerations and, in failing to acknowledge it, allow an alien logical requirement to insinuate itself—just as the artificial philosopher fails to recognize the notion of an intermission-inclusive temporal entity and, in that failure, allows the perplexity-engendering intrusion of an irrelevant logical requirement."

Earlier in this paper the following question was posed: Can there be a substance whose existence, though it has uninterrupted continuance, nevertheless accommodates a gap? In the phoenix we seem to have such a substance. Its existence continues uninterrupted by its periods of death and dissolution and, to emphasize the irrelevance of any residue during these periods, let us add: by its periods of non-existence. To say that the phoenix's existence continues uninterrupted by its periods of non-existence will perhaps seem to involve antilogy. But it does so no more than does saying that although a play's performance is in progress (has begun and has not concluded), it is not in progress (is in intermission).

But here an objector argues: "The logic of myth, like that of dreams, is notoriously elastic. In a dream a man puts on his trousers and finds to his surprise that they are much too small. He takes them off and sees they are no larger than an eight-year-old's. Nevertheless he puts them on again, and this time they fit perfectly, just as he had expected they would. In a myth three deities kill a giant and form the world from his body; his flesh becomes the land, his blood the oceans, his disintegrated brains the clouds, and so on. So, to the question whether there can be a *real* substance whose thorough dissolution does not terminate its existence, the case of the phoenix provides no reliable basis for reply. In dreams and myths substances often undergo things not possible to the real; so even if the phoenix's existence can be said to continue uninterrupted by periods of the

phoenix's death, dissolution, and non-existence, this seems quite irrelevant to the case of real birds, actual cabbages, and non-fictional kings."

Let us address this objection insofar as it concerns non-fictional kings (and other real folk), thus raising in its specific form the central question of this essay: Can a real human being's existence continue uninterrupted by a period during which the human being is dead and has undergone a dissolution so thorough that nothing of him remains? Some will answer that his existence continues uninterrupted if only his death occurs, but that if in addition he undergoes thorough dissolution, his existence ceases: a human being's existence ends in smoke and ashes with his cremation, or in daisies blooming bravely with his reduction to humus, or in invigorated cannibals with his digestion by them, or in a certain milkiness with his dissolution in a maniac's vat of acid, or . . .

Despite its supposed irrelevance, the case of the phoenix suggests the following response to this. None of the dissolutions just described is more complete than the phoenix's reduction to ashes. Yet that nothing (relevant) then remains of the bird evidently constitutes no reason to deny that its existence continues, spanning its period of non-existence and its subsequent new life. That its existence does so continue expresses a feature of the notion or concept of the phoenix. It seems, then, that a human being's reduction to ashes will constitute a reason to deny that his existence continues only if the notion or concept of a human being contains no such feature. Many, of course, will firmly maintain that the concept of a human being is free of any such phoenixity. But others relying on certain religious texts will wish to maintain that the promise of a general resurrection implies that the concept of a human being, like that of the phoenix, is the concept of something whose existence encompasses both a dissolution without remainder and a rising to new life. This position assumes the truth of Reid's doctrine that identity, including personal identity, supposes an uninterrupted continuance of existence. But Reid's doctrine is one that seems impossible to reject in any case. Furthermore, against a Flewian scepticism maintaining that because human beings do not survive dissolution, a future race purporting to be our resurrected selves can at best be only imitations of us, Reid's doctrine yields a position of advantage. To such a sceptic the response can be: "Yes, it is quite true that human beings do not survive dissolution. Nevertheless, if human beings are to be raised as promised, then since the identity of the resurrectees with us implies our uninterrupted continuance of existence, our dissolution, be it never so thorough, yields no reason to raise the spectre of a race of

imitations that take our place on the appointed day—just as the phoenix’s dissolution yields no reason to suggest that the day of its rising witnesses a phoenix simulacrum.”

This response to Flewian scepticism may seem vulnerable to the following criticism: “It fails to recognize that where real substances are the concern, it is a necessary truth that dissolution terminates existence. Just as a substance’s being red or blue guarantees that the substance is coloured because ‘red’ and ‘blue’ are the names of colours, so a substance’s being dissolved in acid or burned to ashes guarantees the end of the substance’s existence because ‘dissolved in acid’ and ‘burned to ashes’ are existence-termination expressions. Thus, to say that although a substance has been dissolved or burned to ashes, its existence may not be at an end, is like saying that although a substance is red or blue, it may not be coloured: both pronouncements involve antilogy. As a substance’s being blue but not coloured is inconceivable, a substance’s being burned to ashes and continuing to exist is inconceivable. The Flewian sceptic is, therefore, correct: any future race of alleged resurrectees cannot be us, but at best only imitations of us.”

A rejoinder to this criticism is the following: “The criticism assumes that if a truth is logically necessary, it can admit of no exceptions; so that if the truth of the proposition ‘The dissolution of a real substance terminates its existence’ is logically necessary, it is also universal, covering all real substances. There are, however, logically necessary truths that embrace exceptions, as Wittgenstein’s work valuably shows. A sentence from *Philosophical Investigations* provides an example: ‘In a horse-race the horses generally run as fast as they can.’⁸ Thus, even if the proposition in question is logically necessary, it may not encompass all real substances. The criticism under examination does not establish that the proposition is a universal rather than a general logical truth; it contents itself with merely comparing the proposition to one that is universal. Until universality is established, no reason has been advanced to reject the view that, though cabins and cabbages cease to exist in their dissolution, kings and commoners do not, and so may, like the phoenix, rise to a new life.”

I will conclude this essay with a brief examination of an argument that, if successful, would validate Flew’s claim that a future race purporting to be our resurrected selves can at best be only our simulacra. Based on Bernard Williams’ well-known reduplication

⁸. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1953, 227. See also sec. 345, p. 110.

argument, it runs this way. The risen race cannot be us because to *be* us is *necessarily* to be us. That is, if it is us, there cannot be even an unrealized possibility that it is not us. But it is possible that a second, equally well qualified race rise with the first one. This possibility guarantees that the race that does rise is not us, since it is not necessarily us. As a proponent of this argument puts the matter, "Identity is a relation which, if it holds, hold necessarily:

$$\begin{aligned} & a = b \not\leftrightarrow \partial (a = b) \\ \text{i.e.} \quad & \diamond(a \square b) \not\leftrightarrow a \square b. \end{aligned}$$

So ... the very *possibility* of an alternate [contending race] showing up [is] sufficient to defeat the identity claim."⁹

Perhaps it is enough of a reply to this argument to point out that its modal mainspring has amusing applications. For example, the woman beside whom I awakened in bed this morning is not my wife, since she is possibly not my wife, since it is possible that during the night my wife split (I mean, underwent "mitosis"), resulting in two equally well qualified contenders for my-wifeness. Fortunately for me she did not undergo this process, for I am, in rather late middle age, beyond the conduct of a *ménage à trois*. Even so, it is distressing to learn that this woman is not my wife because she is not necessarily my wife.

Perhaps it will be thought that she *is* necessarily my wife because it is *not* possible that my wife have "mitosed" during the night. But if that is so, the impossibility is to be explained in terms of the kind of things human beings are. If modal logic is willing to settle for this, than a believer in the doctrine of resurrection can defend his belief by observing that, just as it is impossible that Herbert's wife undergo mitosis because she is of a non-mitotic kind, so it is impossible that a second "contending" race rise because God's promise and power guarantee an afterworld free of Williamsian reduplication. Indeed, the believer might add that one can be even more assured of the eschatological than of the domestic case because in natural kinds mutation and anomalies are not unknown, but of God's word there can be no default.

⁹ J.J. MacIntosh, "Reincarnation and Relativized Identity," *Religious Studies* 25 (1989): 160. I wish to thank Terence Penelhum for calling my attention to this article.

Historical Afterword

Before the procurator of Judaea, St. Paul declared, “I hold the same hope as the [the Pharisees] do that there will be a resurrection of good men and bad men alike” (Acts 24:15). Reflecting on this hope, John Locke conceived, I think, the proto-problem of personal identity, the ur-perplexity that, with Locke’s own classic assistance, blossomed into the present body of literature on the subject, when he observed that “he that shall, with a little attention, reflect on the Resurrection and consider that divine justice shall bring to judgment, at the last day, the very same persons to be happy or miserable in the other who did well or ill in this life, will find it perhaps not easy to resolve with himself what makes the same man or wherein *identity* consists.”¹⁰ The foregoing pages attempt to resolve the odd perplexity about gappiness Locke’s words may engender in one who rejects (in P.T. Geach’s phrase) the “savage superstition” of mind-body dualism.

¹⁰. *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, I.iv.5.

*The Impossibility of Miraculous Reincarnation*¹

J. J. MacIntosh

I have learned a great deal about philosophy from Terence Penelhum during the years we have been colleagues. In particular, though I do not always agree with his conclusions, I wholeheartedly admire his ability to look clearly and critically at both sides of a philosophical question. This paper is an attempt to persuade him to do just that with respect to a central philosophical issue where I used to agree with him (or at least where some of my past selves used to agree with a number of his past selves), but no longer do so.

1. Secret Corruption of the Heart

In *Survival and Disembodied Existence* Terence Penelhum considers the case for what might be called miraculous reincarnation.² His position involves two controversial claims: one, that in a certain class of

1. In writing this paper I have benefited considerably from conversations with my colleagues Ali Kazmi and Brian Chellas.

2. We are light on terminology in this area. “Reincarnation” carries a double load of dualistic baggage, which Penelhum rejects, as do I. The term “survival,” whose cognates I shall nonetheless occasionally use, has been taken over for another important job by Derek Parfit. I shall use “reincarnation” as neutrally as possible, with no intended suggestion either that we are *in* our flesh initially or that, in the cases discussed, we are *reinserted* into it. I shall also press the ugly “reincarnatee” into service from time to time to label persons (supposedly) reincarnated. In both *Survival and Disembodied Existence* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970, hereafter *SDE*) and *Butler* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985), Penelhum often uses the term “resurrection” for specific cases of what I am calling “reincarnation.” “Resurrection,” for me at least, carries with it a strong suggestion of a continuous *something* (in the classical case, Christ’s *body*) that *resurges*, so I avoid it in this context, but I do not believe that I am misrepresenting his position in any non-terminological way.

putative reincarnation cases we have a *choice* about whether or not to identify a given person with another; the second, that such identification is possible over a spatio-temporal *and* causal gap. Penelhum has himself considered the difficulties involved in the first claim in some detail;³ in this paper I shall concentrate on the difficulties involved in the second.

Penelhum suggests that in the standard kinds of case considered in the literature—Locke’s Prince and Cobbler, Hick’s survivors, Bridey Murphy, and so on—we can consistently, though we need not, identify the putative transferee, survivor, or reincarnatee with the original person. Here are four quotations that present his point of view:

We can say that the cobbler and the prince have changed bodies. We can say this because we are able to imagine identifying the pre-change persons through time by reference to the bodies which they had, and to imagine identifying the post-change persons through time by reference to the bodies which they have. But saying this is merely to admit that two people could, at the cost of some conceptual change, be said to *exchange* bodies. It is not to say that they can meaningfully be said to exist independently of the bodies which they exchange. It gives no sense to the conception of a person going *out of* one body *into* another. Further, although we can say they have exchanged bodies, we do not have to do so. We can change our conventions in another way, by inventing the new concept of retrocognition. The only thing that would come near to making the bodily transfer story a *mandatory* reading of the tale of the cobbler and the prince would be our having an independently intelligible notion of that which could be alleged to leave one body and go into the other, and our being able to trace this progress. We may disregard the second of these conditions, for the first is not satisfied.⁴

Let us construct a predictable set of circumstances that seem to fit the concept of . . . resurrection At some (unspecified) future date, a large number of persons will appear, in bodies like (or somewhat like) our own here and now. Each one will claim to be some person long since dead, will have putative memories that “fit” his claim to be that person, and will physically resemble that person. It is clear that there is no difficulty about conceiving the sort of

³. For further difficulties see Michael Stoeber, “Personal Identity and Rebirth,” *Religious Studies* 26 (1990): 493–500.

⁴. Penelhum, *SDE*, 88. Penelhum repeats the claim that the reincarnation story is a logically possible version of such cases in chap. 5 of *Butler*: see especially pp. 124–25.

existence such people would have; in particular, since they would have human bodies, there is no difficulty at all⁵ about their being persisting, re-identifiable individuals *in this future state*. The problem is whether or not they are identifiable with us, the pre-mortem beings who died. It seems to me that there is no compelling reason for saying that they cannot be; nor is there any compelling reason for saying that they have to be.⁶

One can in effect regard persons as what might be called gap-inclusive entities, who disappear into nothing and reappear, full-bodiedly, at the resurrection.⁷

How is one to decide this issue? Certainly the time-gap does not necessitate a refusal to identify in this case, any more than it does in the case of Bridey Murphy. There is no need for persons to be regarded as necessarily continuous entities; they might exist like television serials do, in instalments.⁸

Later, in his book on Bishop Butler, Penelhum envisages the possibility of our encountering apparent cases of reincarnation in large numbers. In such a case, he suggests, the rational course would be to drop all claims to the view that what we have are *replicas* and not *reincarnations* of the originals. To cling to the view that they are not reincarnations of the original people would be, he suggests “ridiculous”:⁹

It would be wholly irrational, if such events took place, to retain the naturalistic conception of the person if one had had it previously, or to continue to hesitate about adopting the Christian conception of the person if one had been hesitating. The only reason why it is not irrational to do either of these things now is that these events have not happened, and are still in the future even on the Christian view.

The Replica Objection, then, is perhaps merely a philosophical worry in the vicious sense. Butler may be right about the matter after all, when he says that a doubt about whether the future life could be of real concern to us is “owing to an inward unfairness, and

⁵. But see sec. 6 below.

⁶. *SDE*, 93.

⁷. *Ibid.*, 94.

⁸. *Ibid.*, 95. Penelhum also argued for this position in his response to an *Analysis* problem set by A. N. Prior: “Is it possible that one and the same individual object should cease to exist and, later on, start to exist again?”, *Analysis* 17 (1957): 123–24.

⁹. *Butler*, 145.

secret corruption of heart.” While I am not free of qualms about this argument, I think at the time of writing that it provides a reason for thinking that the Replica Objection amounts in the end to no more than a negative dogmatism.¹⁰

That atheists were such because of fears of the future was commonly held in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Here, for example, is Robert Boyle on the matter:

The sinful Lusts, unruly Passions, and corrupt Interests of such vitious Persons as Atheists are commonly obserued to be, cannot but haue a great stroke in their Disinclinations, or the Judgements they pass of the truth or falseness of things, and the force of Arguments that are employd to proue them: ffor so predominant an Affection as Selfe Loue is wont to be, especially in men, that thinke themselues born for themselues, and acknowledge no Superior Being, cannot but make a man very indispos’d to approue Arguments that would establish a Doctrine, wch he foresees will highly condemn him, both as to his Opinions and his Practises. And ye natural Connexion he discerns betwixt ye Conviction of a Deity, and ye condemning that course of Life, wch ye Deity must needs abhor, and will severely punish, makes it little less than morally impossible for an already degenerate man to consent to part with Atheism, whilst he resolves to stick to his Vices; many of wch naturally flow from it, and cannot be plausibly excus’d, nor quietly enjoyed, without it.¹¹

However, it is not clear why a “secret corruption of heart” should predispose one to disbelieve in a future life *in general* unless it was also held that such a future life would be one of unpleasantness for those thus secretly corrupted. We may take the general point, “That which we desire we readily believe,”¹² without accepting that there are general grounds for applying it here. If anything, one might expect the desire for life after death rather than its opposite to be affecting belief. Broad, for example, explicitly takes himself to be in a minority in *not* desiring life after death:

¹⁰. Ibid., 145–46.

¹¹. Boyle Papers, 6.301. I am grateful to the Royal Society for permission to quote from the Boyle Papers. These papers are now available in microfilm as *Letters and Papers of Robert Boyle*, ed. Michael Hunter (Bethesda, MD: University Publications of America, 1990). The general issue is discussed in David Berman’s *A History of Atheism in Britain: From Hobbes to Russell* (London: Croom Helm, 1988).

¹². Julius Caesar, *Comentarii de bello civili* II, 27.

Unless I am much mistaken in my introspection, I rather strongly dislike (for my own part) the idea of surviving bodily death. That is because I am of a cowardly and unenterprising temperament, and am moved much more by fear of possible misfortune than by energy, curiosity, or hope. If there should be another life, one can judge of its possibilities only by analogy with the actualities of life on earth. Nothing that I know of the lives and circumstances of most human beings in the present and in the past encourages me to wish to risk encountering similar possibilities after death. If death be the end, one knows the worst. . . . If death be not the end, then one is confined for all sempiternity in what looks unpleasantly like a prison or a lunatic-asylum, from which there is in principle no escape.

I do not suppose for a moment that this attitude of mine is or has been that of the majority. . . . In any event, neither the wishes of the majority nor my personal wishes in these matters can make any difference to the facts, for "things are what they are, and the consequences of them will be what they will be."¹³

Broad's reason, however, does not seem to spring from corruption of the heart, either occult or manifest. In short, Butler's argument leaves me even less free of qualms than it leaves Penelhum.

In what follows I want to offer some arguments to show that, whether or not the objection to the possibility of soul-less reincarnation springs from secret corruption of heart, it is at least more than negative dogmatism. There are straightforward but unanswered arguments in favour of viewing the putative reincarnatees as *not* being identical with their supposed originals, and while that is so, maintaining the opposite point of view is not dogmatism, either negative or positive.

2. Miraculous Reincarnation

No doubt any case of reincarnation would be miraculous, but some cases would be more miraculous than others. In addition to Penelhum, Hick, MacIntosh, and others have claimed Penelhum-like reincarnation to be a possibility.¹⁴ In this section I try to spell out their position in rather more detail than they do.

¹³. C.D. Broad, *Lectures on Psychological Research* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), x–xi.

¹⁴. See, e.g., John Hick, *Death and Eternal Life* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), chap. 15; J.J. MacIntosh, "Memory and Personal Identity," in *The Business of Reason*, ed. S. Coval and J.J. MacIntosh (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966); Bruce

These writers have claimed that, given a certain additional condition, that of uniqueness of resemblance, possession of a rather loosely sketched set of qualities by a person,¹⁵ *R*, say, at time *t'* yields the result that *R* is identical with a person (*O*, say) who apparently ceased to exist at some earlier time *t*. Among this group of writers, those particularly concerned with reincarnation as opposed to more general issues of personal identity make explicit the claim that there is no spiritual or physical entity that continues¹⁶ through the *t* – *t'* gap: no spatio-temporally continuous body whether vile or transformed,¹⁷ no continuing soul, whether Cartesian or Thomistic. They agree, further, that were a situation to arise in which there were two equally qualified contenders for the “= *O*” title, neither would succeed to it. Given all this, I shall argue that their position is inconsistent.

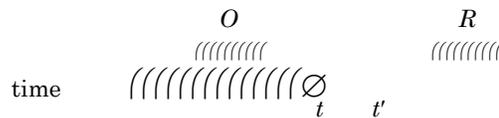


Figure 1

Langtry, “In Defence of a Resurrection Doctrine,” *Sophia* 21 (1982); Eli Hirsch, *The Concept of Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982); and Daniel Kolak and Raymond Martin, “Personal Identity and Causality: Becoming Unglued,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 24 (1987).

¹⁵. Or apparent person: see sec. 6 below.

¹⁶. In order not to beg the question, I do not say there is no entity that *exists* during the *t* – *t'* gap, for the claim is that a gap-containing entity exists throughout the entire period, much as radio or television serials “exist” during periods of non-transmission, but the individual is not *locatable* during the *t* – *t'* gap. See further Penelhum’s response to the *Analysis* problem mentioned earlier.

¹⁷. Unlike miraculous reincarnation, orthodoxy requires a continuing body: “But some man will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come? Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die: And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain: But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body. . . . So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body” (1 Cor. 15.35–44). Compare Phil. 3.21–22: “in heaven . . . the Lord Jesus Christ . . . shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body.” Both texts make it clear that there is continuity between the original and the transformed body.

Figure 1 represents a possible world. In it a given person O has died or otherwise apparently ceased to exist at t . At some subsequent time t' , a person R apparently begins to exist.¹⁸ The claim under investigation is that when there is an *appropriate* relation between a particular subset of the properties R has at, or shortly after, t' , $C(R, t')$, and a particular subset of the properties O has at, or shortly before t , $C(O, t)$, then O and R either *are*, or *may correctly be held to be*, identical.¹⁹ I shall symbolize this congruence relation as “ \spadesuit ” and write

$$C(R, t') \spadesuit C(O, t)$$

when it is presumed to hold. This formula abbreviates a claim such as:

The identity-relevant subset of R 's qualities is related to the identity-relevant subset of O 's qualities in a way that yields the result, other things being equal, that R is, or may correctly be taken to be, identical with O .

What are these subsets, and what is the appropriate relation between them? The subsets are typically unspecified²⁰ but are implicitly assumed to contain (at least) certain q -(mental)-states and dispositions.²¹ Equally, they are *not* assumed to contain either, in the

¹⁸. Closest continuer theorists sometimes write as if it were important whether or not the gap between t and t' is *large* in terms of human sensibilities. Let it, then, be large.

¹⁹. I choose this phrasing because, as noted above, Penelhum has argued that we *could*, though we need not, identify R with O in such a situation. However, were such an identification were to be made, it would be made correctly. For details of the argument see *SDE*, especially chaps. 8 and 9.

²⁰. In *Personal Identity* (London: Routledge, 1989), H.W. Noonan suggests that they might contain only properties that are not mere “Cambridge” properties, while acknowledging the difficulty of specifying the base notion of a Cambridge change clearly. I suppose the properties in question would, at least in the main, be monadic. However, such issues are really matters for the reincarnationists to enlighten us on. Clearly there are many properties apart from the simple “= O ” (for example, “is the child of A and B ”) that would amount to question begging, and so must not be admitted, but what *is* both relevant to identity and admissible remains unclear.

²¹. Nowadays, q -states are presumably as familiar to philosophers as undetached rabbit parts. But just in case: following Sydney Shoemaker (“Persons and their Pasts,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 7 [1970]: 269–85, reprinted in Shoemaker, *Identity, Cause and Mind* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984]; see also Graham Nerlich, “On Evidence for Identity,” *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 37 [1959]), we call those mental occurrences that are intrinsically or phenomenologically indistinguishable from memories q -memories (“quasi-memories”). Genuine memories are

case of R , the relational property, “= O ” or, in the case of O , the property “= R .” Of course, O and R may *have* such properties, but they are not assumed to be in the sets under consideration: that, after all, would amount to a trivialization of the claim. The properties in these sets allow (or require), subject to certain restrictions still to be discussed, cross-temporal identification, and may be assumed equally to allow or require cross-world identification. Figure 2, for example, represents a pair of possible worlds that some event between t and t' has differentiated: a particular radioactive atom decayed in the neighbourhood of Mercury in one of the possible worlds, but not in the other, for example.

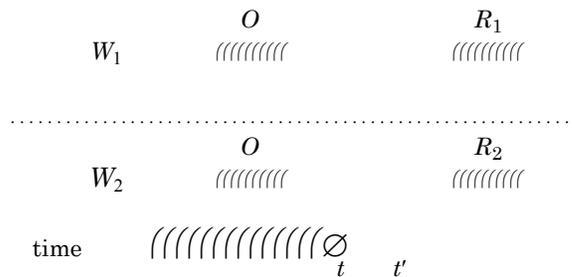


Figure 2

The worlds share a common history up to some time after t , that is, O is the same in both worlds, *ex hypothesi*, and R_1 and R_2 have identical sets of identity-relevant qualities.

As I read the theorists in question, we have not only

$$C(R_1, t') \spadesuit C(R_2, t')$$

but the presumably stronger (in this case at least)

a subset of q -memories, and all straightforward q -memory statements will be factives. If A q -remembers event e occurring, then event e occurred. However, while possession of some q -memories (the genuine memories) will entail the presence at the event of the putative rememberer, possession of others will not. Similarly, we may speak of q -intentions, q -hopes, and so forth. With this nomenclature, genuine memories will be a subset of q -memories, and identity questions may be tackled in non-question-begging language. Or so I assume in the present paper. For an interesting attack on the very possibility of specifying a q -state in the absence of reference to the subject involved, see Marya Schectman, “Personhood and Personal Identity,” *Journal of Philosophy* 87 (1990): 71–92. For a suggestion that the problem is less severe than I suggest, see Geoffrey Madell, *The Identity of the Self* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981).

$$C(R_1, t') = C(R_2, t')$$

and hence

$$R_1 = R_2.^{22}$$

We could also get the same result more circuitously, since we have

$$C(R_1, t') \spadesuit C(O, t)$$

leading to

$$R_1 = O$$

and

$$C(R_2, t') \spadesuit C(O, t)$$

leading to

$$R_2 = O$$

and hence to the earlier result, $R_1 = R_2$.

I would not myself know how to go about specifying the putative sets in question, and indeed I doubt whether they can be coherently specified, but I do not wish to pursue that difficulty in this context.

At this point let us notice that our miraculous reincarnationists are to be distinguished from the more mundane *causal* closest continuer theorists, who explicitly discuss cases where there is typically spatio-temporal continuity between R and O , and always causal connectedness. Among *causal* theorists I would number writers such as Nozick, Parfit, and Shoemaker.²³ It is only with the miraculous group that my present disagreement lies. It is worth noting, though, that there is a school of thought that holds that either there is no significant difference between the two groups or, if there is, that the

²². Modal realists may quite understandably jibe at this identification of R_1 with R_2 , but they should jibe equally at the identification of either with O . See further sec. 5 below.

²³. See, for example, Robert Nozick, *Philosophical Explanations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981); Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984); Sydney Shoemaker, "Personal Identity: A Materialist's Account," in Sydney Shoemaker and Richard Swinburne, *Personal Identity*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984).

miraculous theorists are on safer ground.²⁴ That discussion, too, I here ignore.

Typically, members of the miraculous group allow that something more than the appropriate relation between the two sets of properties is required. It is also required that there should not be two (or more) equally good contenders for the identity title. Incidentally, these writers typically cash in the *appropriateness* of the relation between the two sets of properties by saying that *R* and *O* should (some say *must*) be *similar*.²⁵ Clearly this is insufficient.²⁶ However, let us suppose that there is *some such* appropriate relation.²⁷ The problem is that it will be either too weak or too strong. It will be too weak if it does not yield identity, too strong if it does.

The “too weak” point is obvious. How is the “too strong” claim to be made out? Some sentences are such that they hold necessarily if

²⁴. See, for example, Kolak and Martin, “Personal Identity and Causality: Becoming Unglued.” For a general discussion of the difficulties underlying the attempt to add causality to spatio-temporal continuity, see Douglas Ehring, “Motion, Causation, and the Causal Theory of Identity,” *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 69 (1991).

²⁵. Thus Richard Swinburne (who holds the “empiricist theory” to be unacceptable) writes: “An empiricist theory which allows life after death must claim that in such a case personal identity is a matter of similarity of memory and character” (*The Coherence of Theism* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977], 123).

²⁶. The reasons for this insufficiency are spelled out in Graham Nerlich’s “On Evidence for Identity,” *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 37 (1959), and reiterated in J.J. MacIntosh, “Reincarnation and Relativized Identity,” *Religious Studies* 25 (1989). Awareness of the problem came much earlier, however. David Hume wrote:

All those objects, to which we attribute a continu’d existence, have a peculiar *constancy*, which distinguishes them from the impressions, whose existence depends upon our perception. . . .

This constancy, however, is not so perfect as not to admit of very considerable exceptions. Bodies often change their position and qualities, and after a little absence or interruption may become hardly knowable. But here ‘tis observable, that even in these changes they preserve a *coherence*, and have a regular dependence on each other; which is the foundation of a kind of reasoning from causation, and produces the opinion of their continu’d existence. When I return to my chamber after an hour’s absence, I find not my fire in the same situation, in which I left it: But then I am accustom’d in other instances to see a like alteration produc’d in a like time, whether I am present or absent, near or remote. This coherence, therefore, in their changes is one of the characteristics of external objects, as well as their constancy. (*A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge and P.H. Nidditch [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978], I.iv.2, 194–95)

²⁷. It need be no part of the reincarnationists’ claim that they can *specify* the relation, but it is clear that the difficulty of such specification has by and large escaped them. In the literature on reincarnation Nerlich’s point is ignored rather than answered.

Figure 3

As before, O is the same in all three worlds, that is, the branching occurs after t . In W_1 we have a putative reincarnatee of O , R_1 ; in W_3 we have a qualitatively different putative reincarnatee of O , R_2 ; finally, in W_2 we have what appear to be both R_1 and R_2 , labelled (to avoid the possibility of question begging) R'_1 and R'_2 . The relations that hold between the various pairs are as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} C(O, t) &\spadesuit C(R_1, t) \\ C(O, t) &\spadesuit C(R'_1, t) \\ C(O, t) &\spadesuit C(R'_2, t) \\ C(O, t) &\spadesuit C(R_2, t) \\ C(R_1, t) &= C(R'_1, t) \\ C(R_2, t) &= C(R'_2, t) \end{aligned}$$

The problem for the miraculous reincarnationists is clear. They want to allow that $R_1 = O$, and that $R_2 = O$. However, $R_1 = R'_1$, and $R_2 = R'_2$, but $R'_1 \neq R'_2$. Thus we have a contradiction.

In the literature three distinct lines of defence have been examined: first, that identity claims may be true without being necessarily true; second, that despite appearances, we do not have either $R_1 = R'_1$ or $R_2 = R'_2$; third, that despite appearances, O is not a single entity but an indefinitely large set of entities. None of these defences is particularly plausible, but I shall argue that they are not merely implausible, but cannot be consistently accepted by the writers in question. I now consider them in turn.

3. The Necessity of Identity

When we claim that an individual a is identical with an individual b , that $a = b$, what exactly is involved in the claim?

It is tempting, to put it no higher, to allow that, minimally, identity must meet at least two conditions. First, it must be reflexive:

$$\forall x (x = x)$$

and second, it must obey Leibniz's Law, which we may give by means of the following schema, in which a and b are name letters.³⁰ For any F that is a genuine property of a or b :

$$a = b \supset (Fa \times Fb)^{31}$$

³⁰. The restriction to names, as opposed to other referential devices such as definite descriptions or demonstratives, is not essential but ensures that, at this stage, we do not need to take complicating precautions against scope fallacies.

³¹. In second-order logic we have the easily derived and stronger

$$\forall x \forall y (x = y \times \forall \phi (\phi x \times \phi y))$$

Strangely enough, we must *assume* the plausible indiscernibility of identicals, but we can *prove* the surely more suspect identity of indiscernibles. This raises the question: If we can prove it, why did Leibniz suggest that it was contingent? In the fifth letter to Clarke, secs. 21 and 25, Leibniz noted that non-identical indiscernibles are logically possible, but claimed that their existence in the actual world is blocked by the principle of sufficient reason ("c'est une chose contraire à la

By contraposition, if there is any such F not common to a and b , then a and b are not identical:

$$(Fa \ \& \ \sim Fb) \ \not\leftrightarrow \ a \neq b$$

Given reflexivity and Leibniz's Law, a number of useful results follow. Identity is symmetric and transitive, and such that if a , b are identical they are necessarily identical. In all three cases the proofs are straightforward. Here is a simple proof of the third:

- | | | |
|----|--|---------------|
| 1) | $a = b \ \not\leftrightarrow \ (\partial(a = a) \times \partial(a = b))$ | Leibniz's Law |
| 2) | $a = a$ | Reflexivity |
| 3) | $\partial(a = a)$ | Necessitation |
| 4) | $a = b \ \not\leftrightarrow \ \partial(a = b)$ | 1,3 |

That is one proof; it may be too simple for some. More importantly, perhaps, some may have qualms about implicitly quantifying over individuals within the scope of a necessity operator. Ruth

Sagesse Divine, & qui par consequent n'existe point"). I suggest that Leibniz was thinking at this point of less abstract properties than self-identity. I think (though Adams does not) that he might agree with R. M. Adams: "There are possible cases in which no purely qualitative conditions would be both necessary and sufficient for possessing a given thisness" ("Primitive Thisness and Primitive Identity," *Journal of Philosophy* 76 [1979]: 24).

Barcan Marcus has given us a more complex proof, which is not open to this worry. Here it is in a version offered recently by David Wiggins.³²

Let “ λ ” be an abstraction operator, so that when λ is attached to an open sentence, a predicate is formed. For example

$$\lambda x[\text{Roman } x]$$

is a predicate that holds of all and only Romans. With this notation, we may write “Caesar is a Roman” as

$$\lambda x[\text{Roman } x], \langle \text{Caesar} \rangle$$

and we may render “ $a = b$ ” in this notation as

$$\lambda x \lambda y [x = y], \langle a, b \rangle.$$

Now let us introduce a necessity operator on predicates, say NEC.³³ Suppose

$$1) \quad a = b.$$

Since a has the abstractable property of being identical, and indeed necessarily identical, with itself we have:

$$2) \quad [\text{NEC } \lambda x \lambda y (x = y)], \langle a, a \rangle.$$

Abstracting, we get the property $\lambda z [[\text{NEC } \lambda x \lambda y (x = y)], \langle a, z \rangle]$. Now, what has this property? Well, a certainly has it:

$$3) \quad \lambda z [[\text{NEC } \lambda x \lambda y (x = y)], \langle a, z \rangle], \langle a \rangle.$$

But by Leibniz’s Law, given that $a = b$, whatever property a has, b has. Thus:

$$4) \quad \lambda z [[\text{NEC } \lambda x \lambda y (x = y)], \langle a, z \rangle], \langle b \rangle.$$

³². *Sameness and Substance* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), 109–10. For the original version see Ruth Barcan, “The Identity of Individuals in a Strict Functional Calculus of Second Order,” *Journal of Symbolic Logic* 12 (1947): 12–15.

³³. Note that if NEC is to have a dual, POSS, we will need predicate negation in addition to sentence negation.

But this is to say

- 5) $[\text{NEC}\lambda x\lambda y(x = y)], \langle a, b \rangle$.

Whence we have as a theorem:

- 6) $a = b \text{ } \not\leftrightarrow [\text{NEC}\lambda x\lambda y(x = y)], \langle a, b \rangle$.

It is worth noticing, following Wiggins, that this is not (or not merely) a proof that identity claims are, when true, necessarily true (that is, that the *sentence* claiming identity is necessarily true); this is a proof that identity, when it holds, holds as a matter of *de re* necessity.

What kind of (*de re*) necessity is this? That, interestingly, is little discussed. As far as the formal results go, the answer is that it doesn't matter. But what interpretation should be put on these formal results in our present context? Historically, philosophers have found three main kinds of necessity interesting. In all three cases there is a corresponding notion of possibility as a dual. One sort of necessity, currently much in favour with philosophers, is what we might call *formal* necessity: a sentence p holds necessarily iff $\sim p$ entails a contradiction.

Another sort, which dominates our ordinary-language talk of necessity, is bound by temporal operators: p *now* holds necessarily iff the state of affairs described by p is *now* irrevocable. For example, it *was*, but now no longer *is*, possible for you now not to be reading this paper. It *was* possible for Brian Mulroney not to have become prime minister of Canada, but that is *no longer* a possibility, his having been prime minister is now irrevocable. This sort of necessity is sometimes called necessity *per accidens*.

A third sort that philosophers have found interesting involves a strengthening of necessity *per accidens*: if something always has been, is now, and always will be necessary *per accidens*, then we may call it *absolutely* necessary.

It is noticeable that the last two views tie the possible to the actual world. They involve the notion of *branching from* the actual world. The difference between these two notions and the first may be brought out in the following way. The world, let us suppose, is either infinite in past time, or finite in past time. Some philosophers, such

as Kant,³⁴ have suggested other alternatives, but let us leave that. Let us further suppose that both of these are logical possibilities, though again some philosophers, such as Philoponus and St. Bonaventure,³⁵ have also challenged that. Now suppose the world is in fact finite in past time. Then the existence of a world infinite in past time is formally possible, but it is not possible *per accidens* (there is no possibility of a world with a *finite* past history becoming a world with an infinite past history), and for the same reason, it is not possible absolutely either. (Of course, we can have intermediate notions. For example, we can have a possible-world semantics for logical necessity, and talk of absolute and *per accidens* necessity in a given possible world.)

In the present case, where what we are dealing with is a matter of the possibility of the reincarnation of *actual* people, formal possibility is really of less interest than the other two. What we are interested in is what might become the case in, or what is possible for, the actual world. Is there any story about *our* future (or about a branching from the actual course of events) that either can or must be interpreted as a case of reincarnation?

I claim that the results established above, taken in conjunction with Nerlich's point, put definite limits on what we can say about cases of identity over time, including cases of putative reincarnation or survival. In particular, I want to suggest, they rule out Penelhum's reincarnation alternative.

For whatever reason, some may still have qualms about these arguments concerning necessity. Even without them, David Wiggins has urged, there is a similar point to be made. Consider the case where there are two individuals, both qualitatively similar enough to the original (Guy Fawkes, in Wiggins's example) to allow identifica-

³⁴. See especially *Critique of Pure Reason*, A520=B548 – A523=B551.

³⁵. Arguably Aristotle, earlier, thought we could *prove*, and not merely assert, that the world was infinite in past time. Philoponus seems to have been the first to attempt to prove that it was finite in past time. See Christian Wildberg, ed. and trans., *John Philoponus: Against Aristotle on the Eternity of the World* (London: Duckworth, 1987). For Bonaventure's arguments, which are strikingly similar to those of Philoponus (although the presumed avenue of transmission is not completely clear), see bk. 2 of his *Commentary on the Sentences*, d. 1, p. 1, a. 1, q. 2, translated along with some shorter passages from *Collationes in Hexaemeron* (5.29, 6.2–5, 7.1–2) and the *Breviloquium* (2.1.1–3) by P. M. Byrne as "Selected Texts on the Eternity of the World," in St. Thomas Aquinas et al., *On the Eternity of The World* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1964).

tion with that original had there been only one of them. As Wiggins remarks:

If the stipulation theorists had their way, then it would have to make sense to say to the Guy Fawkes claimant: “If it hadn’t been for that other fellow, who appears to be just as good as you are at reminiscing about attempts to blow up the Palace of Westminster, *you* would have been Guy Fawkes.” Even those who doubt that if one is Guy Fawkes, one is necessarily Guy Fawkes, must find this idea hard to take seriously.³⁶

4. Cross-Temporal but Not Cross-World Identity?

The writers I have been considering usually allow that in a situation where there are two otherwise qualified contenders for the property “= *O*” neither will get it, but claim (without argument, so far as I can see) that if there is no such competition, the sole contender is (or may correctly be considered to be) identical with the original. That is, generalizing over the domain of persons, and writing “*Eat*” for “*a* exists at *t*,” we have

$$\forall x \forall y \forall t \forall t' ((Ext \ \& \ Eyt' \ \& \ C(x, t) \ \spadesuit \ C(y, t') \ \& \ \forall z ((Ezt' \ \& \ C(x, t) \ \spadesuit \ C(z, t')) \ \emptyset \ z = y)) \ \emptyset \ x = y).$$

This highlights the difficulty noticed earlier: we now have the uniqueness identity requires, but we have it by fiat, and we are left with the task of showing just why the (so far unspecified) set of properties is relevant since, given the uniqueness condition, *any* set of properties will yield identity. Since the uniqueness condition is tacked on, and does not follow from other factors as it does in the normal identity case, the claim begins to look somewhat vacuous.

And even so, a problem remains, as figure 3 reminds us. One way out, suggested by Harold Noonan,³⁷ is to deny the identity of R_1 and R'_1 , while allowing the identity of R_1 and O . This is a standard manoeuvre in the kinds of case typically considered in the literature on personal identity,³⁸ but it is suspect here.

³⁶. *Sameness and Substance*, 208.

³⁷. “The Possibility of Reincarnation,” *Religious Studies* 26 (1990).

³⁸. See, for example, Shoemaker, “Personal Identity: A Materialist’s Account,” secs. 12–16.

Before discussing it further, let us make a general point explicit. If A is a sufficient condition for B in a given context, it should not fail to be so in another context merely because, if it was sufficient there, some favoured theory would fall. There must be a *reason* for concocting a different sauce for the gander. And it really is not enough to call upon our “intuitions” here: something fairly substantial by way of argument is required.

Choosing the line of defence Noonan has suggested involves allowing that, in the absence of a competitor, $C(O, t) \spadesuit C(R_1, t)$ yields $O = R$, while simultaneously denying that the stronger $C(R_1, t) = C(R_2, t)$ yields $R_1 = R_2$ despite the fact that in this case too there is no similarly qualified competitor for the identity title. We must hold that the satisfaction of conditions stronger than those which are sufficient to ensure cross-temporal identity are insufficient to yield cross-world identity.

We cannot, in good faith, simply *say* that we have identity in the one case but not in the other, for the conditions that were invoked to obtain identity in the cross-temporal case are present *ex hypothesi* in the cross-world case. But the only reason for rejecting the cross-world identity seems to be that if it is not rejected, the miraculous reincarnation claim fails. Is there an *argument* for rejecting it?

I do not know of one. Arguments for this claim are notably absent in the writers I mentioned earlier (Penelhum, Hick, MacIntosh). Noonan, playing devil’s advocate for this position, remarks, “Nozick’s version of the theory is the most sophisticated in the philosophical literature,”³⁹ but this, if true, is bad news for supporters of miraculous reincarnation, for Nozick’s presentation strikingly lacks argumentative support.⁴⁰

One of Nozick’s main supports for his version of the closest continuer theory rests on the fact that the psychological states of the characters within the film *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, as well as

³⁹. “The Possibility of Reincarnation,” 486.

⁴⁰. Additionally, Nozick is explicitly *not* concerned with cases where causal connectedness is absent. Considering the following case: “As you die, a very improbable random event occurs elsewhere in the universe: molecules come together precisely in the configuration of your brain and a very similar (but healthier) body, exhibiting complete psychological similarity to you,” Nozick continues, “This is not you; though it resembles you, by hypothesis, it does not arise out of you. It is not any continuer of you. In the earlier cases, by *psychological continuity* I meant ‘stemming from’ and ‘similar to’” (*Philosophical Explanations*, 41).

the psychological states of most members of the audience, are reasonable only if the closest continuer theory is true. He writes:

The closest continuer theory is able to account for and explain the character's response in the film, and the audience's response to it Since it is difficult to see how any other theory could do this, this supports the closest continuer theory.⁴¹

It is clear that this is not a *strong* argument. Similar cases could be invoked to “support” spiritualism, dualism, demonic possession, and astrology.⁴² On the face of it, then, the closest-continuer defence of miraculous reincarnation is open to a charge of inconsistency.

The important point here is not, as has sometimes been suggested in the literature, whether or not a phrase such as “the person with characteristics $C(R_1, t)$ ” is a rigid designator.⁴³ The point is simply that we are asked to grant identity in one case while denying it in another, with no clear reason being offered for the distinction. Whether or not definite descriptions are, or can be made, rigid designators is simply a red herring in this context.⁴⁴

5. Multiple Occupancy

Certain animals, even ones with a fairly complex nervous structure such as starfish, have remarkable regenerative powers: if one half of the animal is destroyed, the remaining half can regenerate. Indeed, certain species of starfish are fissiparous, and can reproduce by splitting.⁴⁵

⁴¹. Ibid., 59n.

⁴². I have discussed this matter at slightly more length in “Reincarnation, Closest Continuers, and the Three Card Trick: A Reply to Noonan and Daniels,” *Religious Studies* 28 (1992): 235–51. Incidentally, Penelhum's point, noted earlier, about how people would react in the presence of large numbers of apparently reincarnated people, seems to me to be substantially, even if more temptingly, the same sort of point. People can be wrong in large numbers as well as on their own.

⁴³. For an interesting discussion of Shoemaker's defence *via* non-rigid designators, see the exchange in *Inquiry* between Andrew Brennan and B. J. Garrett (Brennan, “Best Candidates and Theories of Identity,” *Inquiry* 29 [1986]: 423–38; Garrett, “Best-Candidate Theories and Identity: Reply to Brennan,” *Inquiry* 31 [1988]: 79–85; Brennan, “Reply to Garrett,” *Inquiry* 31 [1988]: 87–92).

⁴⁴. On this topic see David Kaplan, “On the Logic of Demonstratives,” *Journal of Philosophical Logic* 8 (1978): 81–98.

⁴⁵. For what it's worth, fissiparous reproduction among starfish tends to be a juvenile activity: the adults prefer sex. (For further details see, e.g., L.H. Hyman, *The*

Now imagine the following three cases. In the first we envisage destroying the (from our point of view) left side (L) of a given starfish (S), leaving the right side (R) to regenerate a new half. Arguably in such a case, $R = S$. For the second case we imagine destroying the right side, leaving the left side to regenerate, yielding $L = S$. And in the third we consider the possibility of simply cutting S in half and letting both halves regenerate. These three possible scenarios yield

- 1) $\diamond L = S$
- 2) $\diamond R = S$
- 3) $\diamond L \neq R$

But, as we have seen in section 3, modalities are irrelevant to statements of identity and disidentity. Hence

- 4) $L = R \ \& \ L \neq R$.

One escape route that has been examined in the literature involves considering the possibility that we had originally not one starfish but two, so that the correct picture is:

- 1') $\diamond L = S_1$
- 2') $\diamond R = S_2$
- 3') $\diamond L \neq R$

from which, clearly, no contradiction flows.

This multiple occupancy possibility is of considerable interest in itself, but it is surely not relevant here, though it has been claimed to be so.⁴⁶ In the standard cases of real entities such as amoebae, planaria, or the asteroidea, there may be grounds for saying that L and R multiply occupied S . But in the case where there is no causal connection whatever, and there are an infinite number of possible “occupants,” the theory becomes considerably less attractive. I do not know that it is in fact held in this context by any holder of the multiple

Invertebrates, vol. 4: *Echinodermata, The Coelomate Bilateria* [New York: McGraw-Hill, 1955], chap. 15.7, “Class Asteroidea,” 245–412.)

⁴⁶ This option is discussed in detail in Denis Robinson’s subtle and ingenious paper “Can Amoebae Divide Without Multiplying?”, *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 63 (1985), 299–319. Robinson points out one interesting result: assuming this solution, in the ordinary course of nature the number of amoebae in the world can only diminish, never increase. For the suggestion that this interpretation is relevant in the present context, see Noonan, “The Possibility of Reincarnation.”

occupancy view. It should be noted, however, that if it is adopted then it holds equally well in the case where there are two *actual* claimants to the identity title, in which case each would be identical with *one of* the original occupants. Thus, the writers with whom I am currently at odds—who explicitly agree that in such a case there is no identification to be made—cannot consistently fall back on the multiple occupancy theory.

I conclude that neither the closest continuer theory nor the multiple occupancy view offers a way out for someone adopting the position under consideration. Since no other defence is on offer, I conclude that that position is unacceptable.

Strangely enough, Penelhum almost agrees with me. He writes:

Bodily identity⁴⁷ is a necessary, as well as a sufficient, condition for the identity of persons. This in turn suggests that the enterprise of attempting to give an intelligible account of the identity of a disembodied person in terms of memory alone is doomed to failure.⁴⁸

I agree that bodily continuity is a necessary condition for the identity of persons, though I do not see clearly how—save by fiat—such continuity is to be established in some of the survival/reincarnation cases Penelhum finds acceptable. Penelhum insists that both the original person and the putative reincarnatee must *have* bodies, but that doesn't really establish the required *continuity* between the earlier and the later body.

Of course, if we had Cartesian souls they would turn the continuity trick for us, *ex hypothesi*,⁴⁹ but as we don't, they can't. If (*if!*) there were some other means of achieving this absence of competitors—if, for example, it were a law of nature (not an observed, or believed, generalization, but a genuine law) that anyone who stepped into our Matter Transmitter Mark 3 would vanish, and at most one qualitatively similar person would reappear elsewhere (preferably, though perhaps for these purposes not essentially, a predictable elsewhere)—

⁴⁷. Penelhum uses the term “bodily identity” as a synonym of “bodily continuity” (*SDE*, 59) and remarks that “bodily identity” involves the fact that “bodies are spatio-temporally continuous” (*SDE*, 66).

⁴⁸. *Ibid.*, 67.

⁴⁹. Or, at least, establishing continuity seems to be one of the reasons why people believe in Cartesian souls. As Kant pointed out in the “Paralogisms,” however, even this is beyond them (see *Critique of Pure Reason*, A363n).

then we could accept spatially “gappy” existence.⁵⁰ Similarly, if it were a law of nature that people could be made to disappear and at most one qualitatively similar person subsequently appeared (again, at some preferably predictable time), we could, as in the spatial case, allow identity. Moreover, these two could clearly be combined to allow for spatio-temporal gappiness.

But there are no such laws of nature known to us at the moment. Nor is it clear in terms of contemporary science what they not merely would, but could, be like. A mere *belief* in their existence is surely insufficient to ground rational philosophical discussion.⁵¹ Nor would it do to have God ensure that there was only one potential reincarnatee: that would be like the Matter Transmitter Mark 2, which could produce any number of clones, but whose operators were sworn to use it to produce only one.⁵²

6. More Trouble

Finally, let me draw attention here, as I have elsewhere, to an interesting difficulty for reincarnationists that has surfaced in the phi-

⁵⁰. For those unfamiliar with matter transmitters, they come in two main types. One is the type in which the actual matter and indeed the actual object is transmitted through hyperspace, thus enabling what would ordinarily be a long journey to become a short one. Such journeys are known to be fraught with difficulties: becoming lost in hyperspace, becoming stuck in hyperspace, becoming insane as a result of experiencing hyperspace, coming out in the wrong part of ordinary space, and so on. These problems are avoided by the second type of matter transmitter, which, despite its name, transmits not matter but information. Essentially a *replica* of the original is constructed at a distant place, it being essential to the device’s gathering of information that the original is destroyed. The hyperspace case saves the day for identity, but it is really just a magical journey in scientific clothing. However, it poses no identity problems one way or the other. The information transmitter, however, does. It involves gappiness, though admittedly not in as extreme a manner as the Penelhum case, since the information transmitter retains causal connectedness. In both cases, however, we lose identity *unless* there is some law of nature that guarantees the reproduction of at most one replica: but what such a law of nature could be is a mystery.

⁵¹. Shoemaker suggests that, in the case he is discussing, we might “just stipulat[e] that the . . . procedure is such as to make . . . duplication nomologically impossible” (“Personal Identity: A Materialist’s Account,” 115), but that is surely inappropriate in the reincarnation case. Nor do I believe it to be acceptable in Shoemaker’s case. Laws of nature cannot just be *stipulated* until we know considerably more about the universe than we currently do.

⁵². The Matter Transmitter Mark 1, alas, transmitted only matter, not structure, so that the things transmitted came out *scrambled*.

losophy of language.⁵³ To be a person, the putative reincarnated “person” must be accorded intentionality. But how is that to be done without begging the question in favour of the reincarnation hypothesis? Putnam has led us to see that the meaning of a word is a function, in part, of the historical context of utterance. We use “water” to refer to H₂O and not XYZ because we live on Earth, not on Twin Earth.⁵⁴ Consequently, our belief that water is wet is a belief that H₂O is wet, while our twins (whose neurophysiological [“mental”] states are exactly similar to ours) believe that XYZ is wet. Donald Davidson moves the argument on a step:

Suppose lightning strikes a dead tree in a swamp; I am standing nearby. My body is reduced to its elements, while entirely by coincidence (and out of different molecules) the tree is turned into my physical replica. My replica, The Swampman, moves exactly as I did; according to its nature it departs the swamp, encounters and seems to recognize my friends, and appears to return their greetings in English. It moves into my house and seems to write articles on radical interpretation. No one can tell the difference.

But there *is* a difference. My replica can’t recognize my friends; it can’t recognize anything, since it never cognized anything in the first place. It can’t know my friends’ names (though of course it seems to), it can’t remember my house. It can’t mean what I do by the word “house,” for example, since the sound “house” it makes was not learned in a context that would give it the right meaning—or any meaning at all. Indeed, I don’t see how my replica can be said to mean anything by the sounds it makes, nor to have any thoughts.⁵⁵

Following Brown, the problem is clear: no history, no semantics; no semantics, no intentionality; no intentionality, no person. Swamp-Davidson has no linguistic history, so his apparent utterances are

⁵³. In my “Reincarnation, Closest Continuers, and the Three Card Trick.” My thanks to Deborah Brown for bringing the relevance of this point to my attention by way of an early version of her “Swampman of La Mancha,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 23 (1993). See further Donald Davidson, “Knowing One’s Own Mind,” *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 60 (1987): 441–58, and Stephen Stich, “Autonomous Psychology and the Belief-Desire Thesis,” *The Monist* 61 (1978): 571–91.

⁵⁴. Twin Earth is a planet much visited by philosophers these days. Anyone still unfamiliar with its liquids should consult, in the first instance, H. Putnam, “The Meaning of Meaning,” reprinted in Putnam, *Philosophical Papers*, vol. 2: *Mind, Language, and Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

⁵⁵. “Knowing One’s Own Mind,” 443–44.

uninterpretable. But if it is not possible to ascribe intentionality to him, he can scarcely be held to be a person.

Prima facie, what we have in the “reincarnation” case is a newly created entity. What is the justification for assuming that this entity’s utterances are meaningful, that they reflect intentionality? To *assume* that the creature has the right background to license such a move is to beg the question in favour of reincarnation; not to assume it leaves unanswered the question: Why then treat it (him/her) as a person at all? It won’t do to say that people observing such creatures would take them to have linguistic competence,⁵⁶ for Putnam’s cases show us how misleading such assumptions can be.

Now it may be that, in our reincarnation case, such a creature could quickly *establish* the right kinds of linkage (connecting his or her utterances of “water” with H₂O if the post-mortem world is aqueously like Earth, for example, or with XYZ if Twin Earth is its model, or perhaps with something quite different, depending on the chemical constitution of the river of the water of life, but we should note that such establishing would also establish *disidentity* with the supposed original.

Quite apart from the earlier difficulties, then, there are unsolved problems for the Friends of Miraculous Reincarnation.

⁵⁶. This is the linguistic analogue of the earlier claim that spectators would *assume* that they were dealing with reincarnated persons.

Comments and Responses

Terence Penelhum

When I heard that Jack MacIntosh and Hugo Meynell had organised this volume, I was very moved and very grateful. It is a great honour. These feelings were increased when I learned who all the contributors were. I want to thank all of them for making these distinguished essays available here, and for the happy associations of which they are reminders.

I have to admit, though, that my gratitude was mixed with alarm when I was asked to comment on the papers. It is quite impossible for one person to produce a response that can begin to do justice to a body of work of this quality, especially when it has to be written in a short span of time. I have been torn between reluctance to go on paper with inadequately considered work and reluctance to cause delay in publication. While I am sorry to have been as long about it as I have, I am sure everyone who reads what follows will agree that the second motive has won out over the first.

The essays fall by subject matter (and no doubt through editorial wisdom) into three groups, and I have written about them as the demands of their subject matter have suggested. While I have taken advantage of the occasion, now and again, to make general remarks about changes in my own thinking, I have concentrated on responding to what is in the essays themselves. No one, I am sure, will think that anything is to be inferred from the relative length of my comments.

My thanks, again, to everyone.

Philosophy of Religion
(Hick, Meynell, Mitchell, Nielsen)

One of the most prominent features of recent work in philosophy of religion has been the influence of what I have elsewhere called the basic belief apologetic.¹ I use this name for an influential group of arguments to the effect that the rationality of religious faith should not be impugned because of the lack (or supposed lack) of successful natural theology. For (the arguments go) this would imply that religious faith is only rational if some of its key beliefs can be inferred from non-religious premises, and this would give epistemic priority to the truths in those premises, and to do that is to presuppose that rational beliefs must all be supported by inference from beliefs of one or two privileged kinds, or must be of one of those kinds. This, it is said, is foundationalist, neo-Cartesian, and chauvinistic; and we ought to know by now that if such a requirement were applied to our secular, common-sense beliefs, they would have to be classed as irrational, since no non-circular epistemological justification has ever been found for them. When this is recognised, we can see that there is no good reason why there should not be religious beliefs that are held without being inferred from others; that they, too, can be properly basic.

This argument-form is very like some of the apologetic reasoning of Pascal and Kierkegaard, who each made use of what I have called the parity argument.² In their hands, this argument has an overtly sceptical form, in which it is assumed that those beliefs of common sense with which religious faith is being compared are held without any rational justification. But the basic belief apologetic has always been expressed in forms that do not owe anything to scepticism, at least on the surface. Indeed, most of those who use it are inclined, I think, to hold that scepticism is itself a result of insisting that epistemic justification can only be present when a belief is provided with external philosophical support, and that it loses its power when this assumption is challenged. I am not persuaded by this, and am inclined to think that the basic belief apologetic is no more than a post-Wittgensteinian version of the parity argument, whose effectiveness

1. I used this title in the essay "Parity Is Not Enough," in *Faith, Reason, and Scepticism*, ed. Marcus Hester (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), 98–120.

2. See my *God and Scepticism: A Study in Scepticism and Fideism* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1983), especially chap. 5.

depends on the analogy between beliefs of secular common sense and religious beliefs, rather than upon the immunity of common sense to scepticism. But this is not the place to argue that; and I think the parity argument, properly deployed, is effective in any case.

In my view, William Alston's version of the basic belief apologetic is far and away the most persuasive and fruitful, and I begin with some reflections on Kai Nielsen's critique of it.

His objections fall into two classes. First, he finds difficulties in Alston's analogy between religious experience and sense perception; second, he finds conceptual problems in the claim that a transcendent God could coherently be said to appear to anyone, or be directly perceived by anyone. I will take these in order.³

Alston's defence of religious experience as a source of justified belief about God does indeed lean heavily on the analogy with sense perception. More precisely, he draws an analogy between the practice of forming and sustaining beliefs through sense experience and the practice of forming and sustaining beliefs through supposed direct experience of God. His argument runs parallel to other versions of the basic belief apologetic in its insistence that the rationality of the practice he defends does not require there to be any external support for the beliefs thus formed—from traditional natural theology, for example. But it is not a mere appeal to some Kierkegaardian leap that he thinks is present in both cases. As I understand him, Alston argues that as it is rational and justified to form beliefs about our physical environment from our perceptions of it, even though philosophical attempts to justify such a practice are irredeemably circular, so it is rational to form and sustain beliefs about God from supposed experiences of his presence and activity. Further, he is not arguing that the hypothesis of God's presence and activity is the best explanation of a particular class of experiences (as the classical argument from religious experience says), but rather that some people believe themselves to have had direct experience of that presence and activity in their lives, and are rational to form beliefs about God from that experience, in the way we form beliefs about our physical environment from what we take to be perceptions of it. There is a double

³. As I write this, I have before me Alston's book *Perceiving God* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991). The timing of these things has meant that Kai's comments are based on earlier presentations of Alston's position in article form. While I think I should use the book in fairness to Alston, I am sorry that we are using numerically different sources.

analogy here between religious and perceptual experience: there is a claim that in both cases we have a rational practice of belief formation that depends on the experience, does not need external justification, and is unaffected by the circularity of appeals to its successes; and there is a further claim that in both cases we have examples of a subject forming beliefs about an object because of the object's appearance to the subject.

I think that both these analogies are defensible; but the fact that there are two of them does give rise to some problems when we try to decide how far Kai's criticisms undermine what Alston says. While it is true that the circularity of attempted philosophical justifications of a doxastic practice may not undermine that practice, this shows only that it is not irrational for those who choose to engage in it to go on doing so. They are within their rights. When the practice is the universal one of forming beliefs from sense perception, the imagination is strained to provide us with pictures of a life without it, and we all feel that the sceptic's cavils are quirky and powerless in the face of all the knowledge the practice has provided us. To stress the likeness of the Christian mystical practice, as Alston calls it, to the practice of sensory belief formation is to do more than note that the arguments of doubters run parallel to those of perceptual sceptics; it is again to imply that doubters run a comparable risk of missing out on knowledge. But doubters are in plentiful supply here, and we need to decide how close the likeness has to be for the analogy to be telling. It is an equally important (and often effective) part of Alston's case that many critics of religious belief are guilty of epistemic imperialism—of insisting inappropriately that the standards of one doxastic practice must be applied in another for it to be rational in its own right; but this sort of defence demands that we recognise the reality and relevance of differences, rather than likenesses.

I come now to Kai's criticism of Alston's epistemic analogy. He draws attention to the apparent absence of phenomenal qualities in the religious experiences. However philosophers describe their nature and their place, such qualities are of the essence of perceptual experience; but what corresponds in the case of theistic encounters to the shapes, colours, smells, and tastes that determine the character of sense perception? I think Alston offers three answers: that there are some mystical reports that make use of sensory language directly;⁴ that mystical reports use comparative concepts when phenomenal

⁴. *Ibid.*, 51–54.

concepts will not do;⁵ and that the lack of a detailed correspondence here does not vitiate the claim made in the large number of available mystical reports that the subjects experienced a (putative) appearance that was direct, as sensory perceivers do when they think they see or hear. He also addresses the “nagging worry” that the only phenomenal counterparts to sense qualities are affective states.⁶ This worry nags, of course, for the reason that Kai gives: that most affective states are *responses* to already perceived situations, not in themselves perceptions of those situations, so that an alleged experience of God that had affective states as its sole content would seem to lack any cognitive core. While I think those of Alston’s answers I have already mentioned are enough to head off the suggestion that *all* putative mystical perceptions are confined in content to affective states, I do not find his responses sufficient. I think he would have done better here to introduce facts he has himself written about powerfully elsewhere;⁷ it seems to me that the subjects of some mystical reports describe changes in their affective states as being themselves experiences of God’s changing them, not merely as responses to something else that God seems to them to have done. In such cases, one has a putative experience of direct divine agency operating on human affections.

Such a suggestion (and I am surprised Alston does not resort to it) does, of course, run into the other main objection Kai raises to any doctrine of divine appearances, namely, the apparent incoherence of saying that a transcendent God can appear to finite creatures at all. This breaks down into innumerable subquestions, and I cannot look at any of them. But, in general, it seems to me that the mystical reports he uses speak of God’s appearing to have certain qualities, or to do certain actions, that are not in themselves unfamiliar in character, but well known: power, or love, or forgiveness.

I take Kai’s question to be this: if it is intelligible to speak of a being appearing to me to have this quality or do this action, how can I intelligibly suppose that this being is a transcendent God? To respond to this, one has to follow one of two routes: either to explore the nature and implications of numinous experience, where some of the formative religious figures seem, to the bewilderment of many, to be

⁵. Ibid., 46–48.

⁶. Ibid., 49ff.

⁷. Essay 11 (“The Indwelling of the Holy Spirit”) in his *Divine Nature and Human Language* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 223–52.

directly conscious of the transcendence of God in encountering his presence;⁸ or to recognise that for most believers, including most of those who think they have encountered God directly in their experience, such experience, for all that it is sometimes direct and presentational as Alston says, has to be conceptualised by those who have it in ways that they must learn through tradition, authority, and other indispensable ancillary sources, whose status traces back to the experience of the formative figures. He concedes that the degree of reliability it is reasonable to assign to Christian mystical practice as a source of belief is lower than that we must assign to basic secular practices,⁹ and this concession reflects the fact that the relation of direct experience to these other sources of faith is inevitably a much less dominant one when we turn our attention to ordinary believers and away from the saints and the prophets and the formative figures of our tradition. In spite of this, however, the core fact about religious experience as a source of potential justification for theistic belief is that both the transcendence of what appears and the qualities and actions the transcendent object is perceived to manifest are part of the experience itself.

A major problem for religious epistemology is the variety of major religious traditions, each with its own set of belief-forming practices and types of key experience. We all owe it to John Hick that this problem is at last being confronted, and I am grateful for the fine statement he gives us here of his view that these experiences are best understood as a range of culturally formed responses to the one transcendent Real, which cannot be experienced “in itself.” While he emphasises the degree to which the character of religious experience is determined by the cultural influences in which it is set,¹⁰ his essay contrasts them all sharply with the world-view, and the alleged faith, of those of a naturalistic persuasion. The issue between them is one that only an afterlife could settle.

Now, I agree that belief in some form of afterlife is essential, and not incidental, to most of the major religious traditions; and there are very few who expect an afterlife without being religious believers.

⁸. Alston’s only reference to Rudolf Otto, on p. 16 of *Perceiving God*, does not suggest that this route seems promising to him.

⁹. *Ibid.*, 238.

¹⁰. Alston, incidentally, argues that this detracts unacceptably from the presentational character of experience of God. I cannot pursue this theme here, but it is central to the understanding of what the relevant religious experiences are. See *ibid.*, 27f, 264ff.

From his early work on eschatological verification onwards, John has rightly emphasised the religious centrality of this. But he reads it as the locus of decision on a fundamental contrast between religion on the one hand and naturalism on the other; he holds each to be a kind of faith; and he holds that the religions are culturally determined varieties of response to one transcendent Reality that naturalists deny. So the two key concepts at work in the interpretive scheme he presents in his essay are that of the world's ambiguity and that of faith. Any serious attempt to find a systematic understanding of human responses to a mysterious world is bound to entail a degree of simplification of rich and complex phenomena, and Hick's writing on these themes is remarkable for its combination of theoretical insight and accuracy of detail; but I must express some doubts about the contrast he presents here between religious faith and naturalistic faith, which I think depends on an over-simplification of what he calls the religious ambiguity of the world.

I used myself to think it sufficient to write of a two-way ambiguity in our world: to suppose that the dilemma of the honest enquirer could be comprehended in a scheme that contrasts a theistic world-view on the one hand with a naturalistic one on the other, each having resources that enabled it to explain away the other's objections and neither being able to refute its opponent decisively. I tried to get away with this in *Religion and Rationality*.¹¹ Hick's work makes it clear that one cannot get away with it, and my own pedagogical experience has also made it clear to me that the facts of religious pluralism cannot be ignored in this parochial way.

But this must have an impact on our understanding of the world's religious ambiguity. It should remind us that the major religions, at least, compete with and criticise one another in the way this inadequate picture tells us theism and naturalism do; and it should remind us that every religion faces naturalistic competition. As Hick presents it here, this latter fact emerges as it should; and I think in this respect his presentation here improves on the one he gives in *An Interpretation of Religion*,¹² where the religious ambiguity of the world is presented through an analysis of the defects in western

¹¹. New York: Random House, 1971.

¹². *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent* (London: Macmillan, 1989). My comments in what follows derive largely from my essay "Reflections on the Ambiguity of the World," in *God, Truth, and Reality: Essays in Honour of John Hick*, ed. Arvind Sharma (London: Macmillan, 1993), 165–75.

natural theology and atheology, and its application to other traditions is left for the reader to infer.

But it is not only true that a naturalistic reading of religious experience poses a challenge to all the religions; there are also problems in the claim that both religions and naturalisms are forms of faith.

There is no space here for me to argue what a faith is. It is clearly not sufficient for one that a person's beliefs are under-determined by the evidence. (I am not even certain that this is a necessary condition.) I think that one implication of the term is the presence of a degree of vision or system in the beliefs that help compose it, and the attempt of those who have it to redirect their lives in accordance with it. If this is right, then while some naturalisms do indeed manifest this feature, others do not. The same is also true of religions. The forms of religion that do manifest it are those of most interest to philosophers, and they are the "higher" forms for this very reason, but there has been no shortage of religious forms that seem to lack it. I am reminded here of Hume's contrast, in the *Natural History of Religion*, between polytheism and monotheism, and the fact that he values the unsystematic and quasi-commercial rituals of polytheism more positively, just because they are less demanding and do not require what Hick calls an apperceptive shift. (Hume is against those.) One can be a primitive polytheist without rising to any overall world-view, and can manifest the same incurious absorption in life taken one day at a time that is a frequent feature of the secular mind.

I say "secular" rather than "naturalistic" because the concept of naturalism entails a self-conscious denial of transcendence, which usually accompanies at least a rudimentary espousal of some materialist world-view; the unsystematic secular mentality I think of is familiar to all of us in those of our technologically sophisticated students who are impervious to the intellectual blandishments of their philosophy instructors. If we put this familiar reality on one side and compare only those who have a fairly systematic religious commitment with those who have a fairly systematic naturalist commitment, then a rather different challenge to a two-way picture of the world's ambiguity emerges. At least some forms of naturalism manifest not only system, but also other features prominent in the religious faiths: apperceptive shift, reorientation of personality, and the subsumption of outsiders' disagreement under the preferred analysis of human nature. I think of Marxism, Freudianism, socio-biology, and increasingly the quasi-religious forms of Green movements. These are not, I am sure we would agree, religions; but those who adhere to them can plausibly be said to walk by faith.

What follows? I think that although Hick's core notion of the world's religious ambiguity encapsulates the epistemological quandary of our age better than any other, it is misleading to hold that the world's ambiguity is a simple matter of religion versus naturalism, for the very same pattern of competition and evidential underdetermination is present between some naturalisms and between the major religions, making the ambiguity a *multiple* ambiguity, and even suggesting to some quite intelligent people that Socrates may have been wrong to insist on the superior virtue of the examined life.

The reality of the Sceptic tradition should remind us that taking life a day at a time without seeking for meaning is the mark not only of primitive or unsophisticated minds. But if we reject this sceptical option, and look for a resolution of the ambiguity that confronts us, then Hick is obviously right to say that the eschatological expectations of some of the faiths offer that resolution, and that the resolution is unavailable now. In the face of this, I have no doubt that Alston is right when he argues that it remains rational for someone who follows a religious doxastic practice to continue in it while looking sideways occasionally.¹³ Short of a resolution of one of the relevant ambiguities, it does not seem that arguments designed to supplant one apperception by another are likely to escape dogmatism or circularity. But, religiously speaking, Hick's overview of the situation seems to me to generate a special difficulty. If I think that the world's major religious traditions, my own included, are culturally relative responses to the Real, and that it is not possible to conceive of, or have, culture-independent access to the Real, does this not have an inevitably adverse effect on the way in which I participate in *my own* religious faith? Does this understanding of how the faiths stand over against naturalism not purchase solidarity at the cost of truth? Am I not forced into a sort of meta-translation as I recite the Creed? This problem is parallel to that sometimes raised by opponents of emotive theories of ethics, who suggest that emotivists may *say* a meta-theory has no implications for the practice it analyses, but are in fact offering an account of morality that takes the stuffing out of moral judgements and would make us care less about them. Would the same problem not arise on a view of religious faith that gives a merely phenomenal status to the beliefs that are held *within* one's own tradition?

¹³. This crude summation is mine, of course. See *Perceiving God*, chap. 7.

There is one possible answer here: that the theory implicitly accords a priority to those forms of religious experience that involve at least an apparent circumvention of cultural forms, and particularly of dogma and ritual: namely, the experiences of the unitive mystics. Perhaps we are to detect a leaning towards this in Hick's comments on Eckhart, Al-Hallaj, and Shankara; but if so, the leaning is short lived, since he concludes they must each retain the conceptual structures of their own traditions even here.

I think, therefore, that the neo-Kantian map of the diverse world of religious pluralism that Hick offers us has the effect, when we examine its grounds, of compounding our sense of our world's religious ambiguity, and of making it more, not less, pressing to hope that perseverance in one religious (or naturalistic) practice can be shown to have an independent warrant and not just to be rationally permissible.

Basil Mitchell has given us the classic statement in our own time of the view that the justifiability of religious belief derives from considerations that are cumulative. He augments this in his essay in this volume with a series of very wise considerations with which I am in agreement. My comments are reflections inspired by what he has said, not criticisms.

He is considering not the adoption of faith in God, but the persistence in it in the face of evidential difficulty. He draws an analogy with secular beliefs in the humanities and social sciences, where there are also clearly visible alternatives that in their turn are underdetermined by the evidence, and where the choice one makes has practical dimensions that may well be urgent and inescapable (where, in James's language, the options are forced options). Although he concedes that the grounds for persistence in faith, as in secular belief systems, are grounds that can sustain false beliefs as well as true ones, he thinks such persistence can show justifying results in two ways: by leading to further truth, and by leading towards salvation.

I do not disagree. I think it is wise to compare religious beliefs (which here clearly means Christian, or at any rate theistic, beliefs) with secular beliefs in the humanities and social sciences, rather than to be lured by talk of paradigm shifts to concentrate on likenesses to the natural sciences. For even though the latter comparison does go through in some respects, it is obviously limited to a common power to yield more truth, and does not extend to a common path towards salvation. Yet the practical implications of social or psychological theories do sometimes include apparent opportunities for per-

sonal liberation. These opportunities are connected with a demand for openness to personal change that gives some of these theories a quasi-religious look, and complicates the understanding of our world's religious ambiguity.

Emphasising once again that I do not disagree with Mitchell's contention that it is a manifestation of rationality, and not of irrationality, for someone to retain religious beliefs in the face of evidential difficulty when it yields these two benefits, I am conscious here, as I have been in my thinking about the work of Alston and Hick, that this is the silver lining on a cloud. This can be seen in connection with both of the benefits Mitchell stresses. In the first instance, one can uncover many truths through adhering to a fundamentally false theory: although no theory one can rationally hold on to can be wholly at odds with the facts, it may well be at odds with the facts *as a whole*. In the second, one can derive many psychological benefits from false (or even incoherent) theories. One does not have to think everything Hobbes said about human nature is true to recognise that his analysis of it has led to many insights into the relation between sovereignty and self-interest, and one does not have to buy into Freudian doctrines to recognise that many therapists who have accepted them have helped to liberate their patients from crippling psychological conditions. To go a little deeper, as the story of Jesus and Nicodemus in John 3 reminds us, the teachings of the great faiths demand for their assessment not merely intellectual openness, but also an openness to rebirth, a willingness to acknowledge the defects of the unregenerate personality and the need to hope for change. Such openness entails at least the beginnings of a commitment to a particular vision of the good (a vision of the good that highlights how far one's own inner being is from its realisation). Newman puts it this way:

The word of Life is offered to a man; and, on its being offered, he has Faith in it. Why? On these two grounds,—the word of its human messenger, and the likelihood of the message. And why does he feel the message to be probable? Because he has a love for it, his love being strong, though the testimony is weak. He has a keen sense of the excellence of the message, of its desirableness, of its likeness to what it seems to him Divine Goodness would vouchsafe did He vouchsafe any, of the need of a Revelation, and its probability. This Faith is the reasoning of a religious mind, or of what Scripture calls a right or renewed heart, which acts upon presumptions rather than

evidence; which speculates and ventures on the future when it cannot make sure of it.¹⁴

What Newman says is both accurate in its depiction of the believer's mind-set and self-evidently damning from the perspective of the sceptic. For it tells us how the believer believes because of the regeneration he or she seeks, and thus exposes for all to see the fact that without this desire for the good the belief would not be there. (One is reminded of Aquinas telling us that the devils, who have all the evidence one could need, and so believe, do not have a faith that saves because they resent what they assent to and do not welcome it.¹⁵)

So we have two important respects in which persistence in Christian faith is indeed parallel to persistence in some secular systems of thought, and is properly judged to be rational because of the very features it shares with them. Mitchell mentions one basic dimension of Christian faith that is only palely reflected in its secular analogues: the dimension of loyalty. Being too ready to doubt the reality of God is like being too ready to doubt the trustworthiness of a friend. Given the necessary connection between judging God to exist and judging that he is to be worshipped and obeyed, in religious faith one has, necessarily, a special reason for resisting the murmurings of doubt. The pale counterparts to this in secular cases are the examples of discipleship and personality cult that are familiar enough from the history of Marxism and psychoanalysis, but which are generally thought to be undesirable accretions that are only contingently related to the rational grounds one might have for adhering to the system. But this special and, indeed, central feature of Christian discipleship, though it makes perseverance in belief more clearly rational, also gives the critic one more ground for driving a wedge between rationality, thus understood, and truth; and gives adherents of Christianity's competitors a reason to say that their form of obstinacy is less stubborn.

Rationality in faith does not vanish when the ambiguity of our epistemic situation is recognised. If the ambiguity is irresolvable, loyalty to one's own may be the most rational choice available. But (and I do not see this as an argument so much as an anxiety) it seems

¹⁴. John Henry Newman, *University Sermons*, ed. D.M. MacKinnon and J.D. Holmes (London, SPCK, 1970), 202–3.

¹⁵. *Summa Theologiae*, vol. 31, trans. and ed. T.C. O'Brien (London: Blackfriars, 1974), 2a2ae q. 5, art. 2, ad 2, 3.

to me that the consciousness of the ambiguity, of the very parity that justifies us in laying claim to that rationality, undermines the assurance with which the adherent of any system, including the Christian, can adhere to it. And in the Christian case the Scriptures seem to make that very assurance a prerequisite of the salvation the adherent hopes for.¹⁶

Here it seems to me we have, in our time, greater reason than ever, not less, for a desire for a successful form of natural theology. For this would *disambiguate* our situation by showing it to be irrational not to believe in God. I think Hugo Meynell is right, therefore, to see the enterprise of natural theology as central to the search for justification. I think he agrees with me that present anti-foundationalist orthodoxies in epistemology have encouraged apologists for Christianity to be satisfied with too little. Even if one grants total success to the basic belief apologetic, and concedes wholly to those, like Basil Mitchell, who stress the moral and intellectual reasonableness of persistence in faith in an ambiguous world, many others enjoy a parallel set of rights. Some of those who use the basic belief apologetic appear to think that the practice of natural theology is based on a mistaken conviction that faith in God is rational only if God's reality can be demonstrated independently of religious experience or revelation,¹⁷ but even if we agree that such a conviction would be a mistaken one, I do not think that the practice of natural theology has normally been based on it. The traditional arguments for God's existence, for example, sought to show that those who are in possession of the evidence cited in the premisses would be unreasonable *not* to acknowledge the reality of God when the implications of this evidence are understood. If this could be shown, then although many vital choices would remain to be made between one form of theism and another, a huge partial disambiguation would still have taken place. This would be unaffected by the undoubted fact that the number of atheists would not diminish, for what is at issue here is what it is rational to believe, not what people would decide. The task of disambiguation would also, of course, be discharged the other way if a philosopher were to demonstrate successfully, as many try to do, that God cannot exist. But the absence of a successful natural

¹⁶. Total and unhesitating trust is repeatedly said to be the source of miraculous healing in Mark's gospel, for example. On this theme see Christopher D. Marshall, *Faith as a Theme in Mark's Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

¹⁷. I have tried to go into this point in more detail in my "Parity Is Not Enough."

theology forces apologists to claim victory when they have been able only to gain the intellectual world's permission for their faith; to show they have a right to it; that their leap is as good as the next person's. When such a victory is won, however, we still find ourselves in a world where conscientious hesitation and rejection are not only possible but common, and this is a deep problem for a tradition where faith is held to be a condition of salvation.

Meynell and I agree, therefore, that the enterprise of natural theology is not one that apologists should be ready to abandon; and I think that the lack of clear success in it is something we can properly bewail. In these circumstances, I truly regret not being able to be more receptive to the cosmological argument he defends in his essay. I draw in my comments not only on that essay, but also on my reading of the fuller presentation of the argument in his *The Intelligible Universe*.¹⁸

He argues that the world's intelligibility is best explained by its being the creation of an intelligent will. We are, that is, in the realm of probability argument, as we usually are when considering versions of the argument from design. When he says our world is intelligible, I take him to mean (*i*) that it is independent of our senses and reason, but (*ii*) that we can observe it through our senses and use our reason to formulate scientific theories about its nature, including theories that do not mention only properties our senses reveal to us; and (*iii*) that we can confirm these theories through further observation. It is clearly important for his argument (*iv*) that some of these theories are agreed to be true, not merely pragmatically or adaptively convenient. (Put another way that I do not find helpful, he assumes some form of realism about scientific theories.)

I think I see why his argument depends on the assumption that some scientific theories are true, and not merely convenient. I can indicate this by reference to someone who did not assume this, namely Hume. When Hume in Sections IV and V of his first *Enquiry* tells us how, as he sees the matter, custom or habit rather than reason generates our beliefs about the natural world, he goes on to make a rather irritating ironical comment.¹⁹ He says that there seems to be a pre-established harmony between the natural generation of our

¹⁸. London: Macmillan, 1982.

¹⁹. See *Enquiries concerning Human Understanding and concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. H.A. Selby-Bigge and P.H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 54–55.

beliefs and the course of nature, and that those who favour such things may well detect final causes at work in this. Now his irony conceals a real puzzle. Whyever is it that we manage to generate beliefs that serve us so well? Can it be mere coincidence? His system offers no answer; the beliefs just do work, and the question of why they do is the sort of question that is beyond our faculties to determine, though not beyond our capacity to speculate about idly. Now in our post-Darwinian intellectual environment, we can offer an answer of a sort to this puzzle, and it is one that Hume himself would have been glad enough, I think, to appropriate.²⁰ We could suggest that our ancestors, through genetically based tendencies to repetition, developed a habit of thinking of the future as like the past and of expecting familiar patterns to be repeated, and that creatures not thus equipped by instinct could not have (or have not) survived as we have done.

Such an explanation would, I think, be satisfying enough if one does not assume (and Hume's system, being a sceptical one, does not assume this) that the beliefs we have are true rather than adaptively convenient. I turn now to the way that Hugo Meynell responds to Darwinian-style explanations of our scientific understanding of the world. He says they put the cart before the horse: they explain how it might be that beings like ourselves, placed in a world that is intelligible, might come to make sense of some of it; but they do not explain why it is that our world *is* intelligible. What is he saying here? I suggest that we have to read him this way: given that we know that some of our scientific beliefs are true (the argument does not, I think, require us to identify which ones, as long as we can claim to know that there are some), then the fact that we have come to hold beliefs that are adaptively convenient is only a part of this. An explanation of the adaptive convenience of our beliefs leaves something out, namely the *truth* of some of them.

Unfortunately, I do not think that this gives us a new natural theology. I leave aside the fact that I am not persuaded by his crisp refutations of the relevant forms of scepticism about our beliefs here, and agree for the sake of argument that we do know, independently, that some of our scientific theories are true. What puzzle then remains after we have conceded the potential adequacy of the evolu-

²⁰. As is well known, he offers a crypto-Darwinian explanation of the orderliness of the cosmos as an attractive but idle speculation in Part VIII of the *Dialogues*—the “Epicurean hypothesis.”

tionary explanation of our possession of adaptive beliefs? I am afraid it is not the one he claims to identify. What remains, it seems to me, is the question of why we have in our universe the particular forms of natural regularity that we do have, and have identified, rather than one of the indefinitely large number of cosmic arrangements to which we might have adapted coincidentally with the same set of scientific beliefs. This breaks down into two component parts: first, why do we have these particular physical or biological laws rather than some other set? and, second, why do we have natural regularities at all? The first is for the relevant sciences to answer. The second is the question to which the classical argument from design directs itself, and it seems to me that Meynell's argument collapses into it, once the possibility of a partial explanation of our possession of adaptively useful beliefs is conceded.

I have assumed in the above that we have refutations of scepticism about scientific theories, so that we know, independently of this argument, that some of them are indeed true and not merely adaptively convenient. I have therefore placed maximal stress on the importance of item (iv) in my interpretation of the intelligibility of the world. But I feel I have been dense in my response to the argument, and that it does not reduce to the old argument from design because it is intended to focus our scrutiny on the requirements of our *discernment* of the patterns in the world, rather than the *fact* of those patterns. The puzzle for which the postulation of divine intelligent will is the best answer is the puzzle of why it is, when we do have true theories that correctly describe the patterns of regularity in the universe, and have (ex hypothesi) plausible alternative accounts both of the presence of those patterns and of our having evolved the thought processes that lead to the formulation of the theories that describe them, that we can *still* wonder why we have managed to hit on *true* theories, or theories that *fit* the patterns they describe. I think I can feel this residual puzzle, although I am not at all sure it is a real one—that is, that my description of it is coherent, and not a case of picture thinking of the most degenerate kind.

Let us suppose it is a real puzzle, and that it is the puzzle that Meynell's argument is designed to place before us. I am unable, as I write this, to see the appeal to divine will that it leads to as being distinct from the appeal to divine will that Descartes makes in the *Meditations*, where he argues that scepticism about knowledge of na-

ture can only be avoided by means of it.²¹ But just as Meynell's argument is clearly intended to be distinct from the classic argument from design, it is also, I think, intended to be distinct from the argument of Descartes. If it were a contemporary version of the Cartesian argument, the obvious difficulty in it would be that if the appeal to the divine will is necessary to evade scepticism, the reality of the divine will needs independent demonstration, and if we have (as I think Hugo thinks he does have) independent refutations of scepticism, the appeal to the divine will is not necessary.

I am truly sorry here to have engaged in the exasperating practice of telling a valued fellow-philosopher what I think he is about; but I do have some problem in locating the exact phenomenon on which his form of natural theology is based. I have no principled objections to metaphysical puzzles; I detest, having myself experienced it, the tactic of seeing no puzzle at all where a colleague finds one; and I have none of the fashionable distaste for using what I have heard called the *t*-word. But I have to confess that the difficulty I have with Hugo's argument is not that the reason he offers for believing in the existence of the divine creative will is not an adequate one, but that I am unsure what the reason, exactly, is.

Hume Studies (Baier, Flew, MacIntyre, Norton)

Annette Baier's examination of the *Natural History of Religion* is full of detailed insights and fills a real gap in the literature. I cannot do justice to it in a short response, but will pick out one or two topics on which I might have minor points to add. In spite of some of its stranger features, I think the *NHR* is a work it is essential to know and understand in order to assess Hume's evaluation of religion. His purposes are never all on the surface, but notoriously in matters of religion, there are special difficulties in deciding on his objectives. So I will begin by commenting on her view of Hume's overall procedure. She emphasises what she calls the reflexivity of his method—a concept she has used with such illuminating effect in interpreting Hume's *Treatise*.²²

²¹. This argument has been revived recently. See Clement Dore, *Theism* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1984), chap. 9.

²². In *A Progress of Sentiments: Reflections on Hume's Treatise* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).

I am uneasy about my grasp of how she understands this notion. She says, first, that in the *NHR* Hume instructs us by showing us a tale of a troublesome passion turning on itself, in the way we correct the partialities of the passions in civil society by producing the impartially operating artificial virtues. She adds at once that in the religious case Hume has to teach us by example how to do this, and does not find it ready to hand for him to describe. The “first religious principles” might, on Hume’s account, become reflexive, so that Hume’s meta-study of religion is one in which he tries to use some of the emotions that generate religion, such as awe, bewilderment, and fear, to understand religion itself. She shows in the latter part of her essay, especially her fine discussion of the general corollary with which Hume closes, that he sees the enterprise as one that would contribute, through the enlargement of religious self-knowledge, to greater religious tolerance.

I have one worry about this, if I have it right. It makes Hume’s study into one having the form of an in-house investigation: one that might resemble (if I can reach for a contemporary illustration) a theological enquiry into whether the church’s traditional strictures against homosexuality or the remarriage of divorced persons are really consistent with its basic principles and motivations. It seems to imply that someone who engages in it is someone who him- or herself exemplifies (*has*) the religious motives being scrutinised. There is no doubt this is a stance that fits what Hume does for us in other spheres in the *Treatise*, where Baier’s exegesis is a corrective to older misreadings and accusations of circularity. But it is very problematic in the case of religion.

Baier is receptive to Gaskin’s view that Hume himself espouses an attenuated deism.²³ If we agree to this, we could surmise that in the *NHR* he is examining the origins in human nature of the forms of religion that have led to this one, which he espouses himself. And there is no doubt that the emotions of awe, bewilderment, and fear are emotions he feels *towards* religion, even though any form of religion he might himself be said to have does not otherwise manifest them within itself.

²³. J.C.A. Gaskin, *Hume’s Philosophy of Religion*, 2d ed. (London: Macmillan, 1988), 219–29. On 220, we get the wise remark, “We should beware of so relying upon Hume’s irony that we read an often repeated declaration as an often repeated denial.” In what follows I may be doing this, but naturally I do not think so.

But I find this strained. I agree with Yandell, as I think Annette Baier does, that we should place the discussion of religion and human nature alongside his analyses of the motives of the natural beliefs in the *Treatise*, and that much of the discussion in Part XII of the *Dialogues* belongs with it too. If we do this, it becomes clear at once that all his praise of the design argument in the *NHR* is as insincere as it seems in both places. The “natural religion” that emerges in Part XII, and seems even to satisfy Philo there, involves the “plain, philosophical assent” Baier speaks of, and I read this as saying that it is uncontaminated by the disturbing passions that are identified as the sources of religion in the *NHR*, where he repeatedly separates the philosophical reasons one might have for accepting the reality of a God from the causes that have actually produced religion as it is. This strongly suggests that he does not see anyone who believes because of the argument (even if this includes himself) as part of the crowd whose motives the *NHR* analyses. This is a key part of his deism’s attenuatedness. And, I am sure we would agree, there is no plausible interpretation of Hume that would ascribe any form of theism to him other than this one.

This would not undermine Annette Baier’s exegesis in any serious way. For Hume could still be doing something here that is closely analogous to his procedure in the *Treatise*. Instead of turning the instinctive machinery of our nature on human belief in the participant’s way she finds him doing in the *Treatise*, he could be following much the same procedure from an *assumed*, though insincere, stance, in order to show those religious believers who will look, how their commitments have arisen, and how their divisions mirror deeper conflicts in their own histories and attitudes. This reading gives a dimension to the *NHR* that no previous reader has picked up, and I am truly grateful for it. To explain: it is often said by believers in the fideistic tradition that Hume has done Christianity an unintended favour by showing in the *Dialogues* that it is a mistake to try to base one’s commitment to it on philosophical argument. Those who say this see themselves as giving a negative philosophical support to faith by suggesting its enemies understand it better than some of its friends do. Some of its philosophical friends of a different theological persuasion might now argue that by exposing the insincerities and bigotries to which the inner logic of the religious emotions leads in popular religion, Hume in the *NHR*, or at least those more considered parts of it where he manages to rein in his sarcasms, is doing them a different favour, this time an intended one, by pointing towards a more tolerant religious form that can emerge from philosophical

reflection. Given Hume's obviously low view, as I read him, of the arguments for theism that he examines (and whenever he is not *merely* praising them he is devastating them), this might seem like a patently hypocritical exercise, in spite of the formal concern for "true religion" that appears in Part XII and elsewhere. But I do not think that is so, and I will try to explore it further.²⁴

What I shall say here is speculative, but not very. It does need some confirmation through consideration of what Hume intends in those places where he lets himself talk about religion's proper function, or about "true" religion. I do not think that this is something we can grasp through the philosophical texts alone; it needs to be supported by a careful look at Hume's relationships with his philosophically minded friends in the Moderate clergy, for example. (I have this in mind as a project, but these remarks precede its execution.)²⁵

I begin with the psychology of the *NHR*. If we follow the lead of Baier and Yandell in seeing what goes on there as close to the psychological procedure of the *Treatise*, it is plausible to take a clue from the discussion of perception in I.iv.2, where the psychological account of the genesis of our natural belief also involves Hume in comment on the sources of the theories philosophers have invented to support it. These are, in particular, representative theories, where philosophers have invented a distinction between fleeting and unstable perceptions and stable and continuing physical objects. Of these theories, Hume says that "as the philosophical system is found by experience to take hold of many minds, and in particular of all those, who reflect ever so little on this subject, it must derive all its authority from the vulgar system [i.e., naive realism]; since it has no original authority of its own."²⁶ If the "philosophical system" has any power to persuade us, it is because it is intended as a support for something we believe already—even though a dispassionate examination of it would show it to be at odds with the latter. If we turn back to the *NHR*, I suggest, first of all, that Hume is suggesting something analogous. The design argument for God's existence does nothing to establish its conclusion.

²⁴. I draw here on some parts of the paper on the *NHR* that I gave at the Eugene meeting Annette Baier mentions.

²⁵. There is plenty of scholarly material on hand, most notably Richard B. Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment: The Moderate Literati of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1985).

²⁶. *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge and P.H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 213.

But it has persuaded lots of people, both sophisticated philosophers such as Butler and those who have reflected ever so little. This is because its conclusion is something that they are already disposed to accept through causes of a quite different sort. It is essential to take with maximum seriousness here the point Hume insists on at the outset of the *NHR*, that the philosophical arguments are based on emphasising the regularity and order of the world, whereas the motivations to popular religion, which install the belief in invisible intelligent power in the first place, are exactly opposite, deriving from a fearful awareness of the particular and the unexpected. So the argument has no independent force, and no need of any, and Hume's formal praise of it has to be explained independently.

What of those who think the argument is a good one? Well, as the deists had been reminding everyone for a long time, the conclusion of it, though *nominally* orthodox, suggests a non-interventionist deity. (It took Butler the whole *Analogy* to make a case against this.) Those who already believed in God and were glad of the philosophical support would be very likely, as the Moderates were, to be averse to enthusiasm and to any forms of interventionist theology. There is every reason to think that Hume viewed their form of "true" religion as antithetical to religion in its popular and orthodox forms, and perceived its deeply heretical character quite clearly. I myself see Hume as a closet atheist, living in an age where his contemporaries, including his very valued friends, found atheism unthinkable. Both in theory and in practice, Hume would be prone to self-doubt on any matter where he found himself in such a tiny minority; and even if this had not been so, he would have settled for "true," philosophical, unreligious religion in the expectation that if it were to prevail over its competition, popular, "false," that is, *real* religion might wither away.²⁷ After all, the forces that generated it in the past are "secondary" ones in our natures, and a change in environment might mitigate or eliminate their effects in polite society. In the meantime, an exposé of the ways in which they generate hypocrisy, intolerance, and superstition could help this process along, especially if there is a nominally religious stance from which this exposé could be developed, so that those believers minded towards a tolerant and secularised religious life could be brought to recognise its truth. It is just such an exposé that the *NHR* offers us; but if the story I have tried to tell

²⁷. Until this happens, if it ever does, it is possible for Hume to make the play with the notion of atheism that Baier notes.

here is at all close to the truth, it is not surprising that Hume's hostility to the forces whose workings he describes comes through in spite of his nominal sympathy for the philosophical theism he distinguishes from them.

I think all this is fully consistent with the insights Baier offers us throughout on the course of the *NHR*'s arguments. Certainly it fits her stress on the way, in Section XIII, Hume highlights the built-in ambivalence towards the sterner aspects of both the polytheists' gods and the God of monotheists; this would naturally lead us to revise the understanding of what "true" piety would require, in the direction of mercy and consistency and toleration—although that revision might suggest, in the minds of those who are properly impressed by the fact that such truer piety would be the offspring of darker forms, that inner inconsistency is the very essence of piety itself, so that a truer form is merely a stage on the road to none at all. Hume's emphasis on the inner conflicts that are generated when beings whose reality is accepted from fear are then turned into objects of adoration, especially after the transition to monotheism, is a strong rival to Freud's Oedipal analysis of the same forms of ambivalence.

Which brings me to the general corollary. I think all the elements Baier finds there are there indeed, and the subtleties of the whole work are easier to slide past here than anywhere. I think it helps us to look forward to the *Dialogues* as well as back to the *Treatise* when we contemplate the structure of this section. The first paragraph repeats the almost platitudinous praise of the design argument with which the *NHR* began; but it is quietly augmented later, in the fifth paragraph, by the remark that "nothing surely can more dignify mankind, than to be thus selected from all other parts of the creation, and to bear the image or impression of the original creator." I do not think this is merely a sarcastic reference to the doctrine of the *imago Dei*, although it is hard to see how anyone would not recognise it to be that. I think it is also a foretaste of the contention of Philo in the *Dialogues* that the design argument selects one of the observed causes of order in the universe, namely, human mentality, and treats it as the sole model for postulating the cause of creation. For, as Baier stresses, this paragraph comes after three others in which the evils, confusions, and absurdities of the created world are emphasised, and emphasised as supplying the causes of actual religious beliefs—beliefs in which the image of God is "disfigured." The balancing of goods by evils (and great goods by great evils) calls to mind the powerful discussion of evil in Part XI of the *Dialogues*. Here the weakness of the design argument is shown, rather than said, by

means of a display of those facts which serve as counter-evidence to it and also as sources of the very popular faith for which it is providing a philosophical substitute.

When the argument is suitably weakened, to yield the toothless conclusion Philo voices in Part XII, the result may not be worth more than a plain philosophical assent, yet for that very reason it is an escape from the “fury and contention” from which Hume hopes philosophy can rescue us. While I think, myself, that Hume hoped the calm regions of philosophy would be innocent of religion altogether, I also think that the polite religious forms of philosophical theism were as near to this as he expected us to get.

Alasdair MacIntyre’s essay is so rich in important themes that I can touch on only some of them. There is one key place where I find I disagree, and I shall concentrate on that, in spite of being tempted to write at length about topics on which our views, I think, are closer.

Let me begin by applauding his comments on the extensive parallels between Hume’s epistemology and that of Pascal. I do not think it is too much to say that a great deal of Hume’s philosophical system, and not only his philosophy of religion, is a self-conscious attempt to draw consequences opposite to those drawn by Pascal from analogous perceptions of the human condition, and in particular of the way our natures determine our beliefs.²⁸ But of course only some of this surfaces in the section on miracles, where Pascal is made to figure as a paradigm of the erudite dupe.

MacIntyre says that Hume has two distinct arguments against the acceptance of miracle testimony. The first, an empiricist argument, depends on noting that testimony has to be judged by experience, and is vitiated by two factors: it ignores the fact that the experience to which we appeal to judge the quality of testimony must include the experience of others, and must therefore be based on testimony in its turn; and it ignores the importance that even the strangest story acquires when it is vouched for by persons of sophistication and integrity (like Pascal). The second, naturalist, argument MacIntyre finds in Hume depends on maintaining, as a premiss, that there is a law that explains every event, from which it follows that the best evidence in the world must fail to establish the reality of an event contrary to such natural laws.

²⁸ Any discussion of direct influence is complicated by the problem of the sort of access a reader in Hume’s day would have had to Pascal’s opinions. I have looked at this in “Human Nature and Truth: Hume and Pascal,” *Lumen* 12 (1993): 45–64.

I agree with MacIntyre, and Fred Wilson, that Hume does indeed hold to this last view. (I also think, against Wilson, that this is the “Prussian Hume” he does not think exists.) Indeed, Hume appeals to this view with a knockabout dogmatism when it suits him, especially in his discussions of the freedom of the will. But I will not go into this here, though I have one or two comments to make on it in connection with Antony Flew’s discussion of causality below. For although I agree that he believes it, and that it motivates him, I am not sure at all that we find him using it in the miracles section of the *Enquiry*. Here I incline to Flew’s more conservative reading of that section, against MacIntyre and Fogelin. I turn now to the place where they find Hume using this second, more metaphysical argument, in the first half of that section.

After the first disingenuous reference to Tillotson, Hume says he will offer us “an argument of a like nature” that will be an “ever-lasting check” to superstition. Experience is our only guide to matters of fact, but it is “not altogether infallible.” For sometimes it yields constant conjunctions that justify confident predictions, and sometimes not. So a wise man “proportions his belief to the evidence,” by treating his past experience as a “full *proof*” of a future event he predicts when he has had “infallible” (unvarying?) experience, and being more cautious in recognising that he has only probability when there is “an opposition of experiments and observations.”

He now applies this contrast between proof and probability to “a particular instance.” This is reasoning based on testimony. Such reasoning must allow for the fact that there is no necessary connection between an event and testimony to it, and that we must judge such testimony in the light of experience. When we do this, we will regard the evidence of testimony either as yielding proof or as yielding only probability. When we are confined to the latter, we may hesitate because of many factors that can “diminish or destroy” the testimony’s force. One such factor is the fact that the event attested to is one that “has seldom fallen under our observation.” When this is so, it is wise to hesitate, even if the testimony is of the highest quality (“Cato”); the Indian prince who doubted accounts of frost was mistaken, but still “reasoned justly.”

We are now at page 114 in Selby-Bigge. Hume now asks: What if the event is a miracle? Then, he says, even when the testimony, “considered apart and in itself,” amounts to “an entire proof,” we have at best “proof against proof, of which the strongest must prevail.” That is, I take it, deadlock or equipoise.

He now says why. It is because a miracle is a violation of a law of nature. This is the first place where laws are mentioned in the argument. He goes on to explain that “nothing is esteemed a miracle, if it ever happen in the course of nature,” that a dead man’s coming to life “has never been observed in any age or country,” concluding that as there must be “a uniform experience against every miraculous event, otherwise the event would not merit that appellation,” we have here “a direct and full *proof*” against the existence of any miracle. He then says that this shows no testimony can be sufficient to establish a miracle unless its falsity would be more miraculous than the fact it endeavours to establish.

While the footnote about the agency of the deity muddles the argument slightly, it seems to me as I reread it that although Hume manifestly does believe all the things about the law-governedness of nature that MacIntyre and Wilson and Fogelin say he believes, the argument he presents here is not one that requires him to appeal to this belief, and I do not see that he does.

What his argument does require, and what he does say, is that a miracle is a violation of a law of nature, which I take to be a conceptual claim; and that when we have an established law, we have uniform experience “against” it. Now, although Hume may believe that all events in nature fall under natural laws, the argument does not require this to be the case. It only requires that if an event *does* fall under a natural law, no contrary experience has existed, and that miracles would contravene this uniform past experience. (If there were classes of event that were not covered by natural law, testimony about them might be subject to the distinction between probabilities and proofs that he develops here, as far as I can see, but testimony to such events would not run into the difficulty that they might be miraculous.) For his argument to have interesting applications, the reader has to agree that there is a natural law, or group of such laws, that tells us the dead never come to life, or that wood cannot burn without being consumed, and Hume certainly states his point on 114–15 in ways that assume we know that phenomena like these *are* law governed. How he, of all people, can assume such a thing indeed merits question, and I will return to it. But his definition of a miracle confines discussion to the cases where this is assumed. Hence, it does not need, nor does he here appeal to, any metaphysic of nature that requires natural law to be universal. So, in this section, I find only the first, and not the second, of the two arguments that MacIntyre finds. The argument that I think is there is the argument that since when a miracle is at issue, nothing like it has ever happened before,

there is a negative proof (in the special sense of this section) that overrides even the best testimony, or at least neutralises it. So, what is established, if this argument is successful, is that testimony to miracles should never be assented to: not that there are no miracles, or that every event is subject to natural law.

(I should add parenthetically that although I do not think Hume appeals directly here to his conviction that every event falls under a natural law, he does have another argument that would weigh in the probability scales against miracle testimony. It does not appear here, but in the next section of the *Enquiry*. He argues there that even if we accept that the design argument establishes the reality of a divine cause for the world, it does nothing to suggest that God either could or would do more than he has already done in establishing the system of nature from whose order we have inferred his existence. He sides with the deists and against Butler, in favour of a non-interventionist reading of the nature of any being proved in this way. This explains an oddity in his treatment of miracles in Section X. When he says he is providing a check against attempts to use the miraculous to establish a system of religion, he seems to be ignoring the fact, with which his readers would have been familiar and of which Paley later reminded them, that the appeal to historical miracles by apologists was an appeal intended to follow a prior demonstration that there is a God whose intentions and concern such miracles would attest. To accept this is to change the whole pattern of likelihoods against which the evidence for miracles should be judged. The deists had said that an orderly God would not intervene, so that a proof of God from the world's order could not support such evidence; Butler had tried to answer them in the *Analogy of Religion*, and Hume, I think, takes their side again in thin disguise in Section XI. This gives some explanation for the fact that he writes in Section X as though the appeal to miracle testimony has to carry the whole evidential weight of a theistic religious system, when his readers might well not expect this. Paley seems only to have read Section X. For our purpose in responding to Section X, his later argument serves to underline that he does indeed think miracle testimony must be assessed by totally secular standards. He is arguing that it must fail when so judged.)

Is his argument a successful one? There is, of course, Campbell's point that the allegedly uniform experience against the miraculous is itself something to which we only have access through testimony. But whatever the strength of this difficulty, Hume shows no sensitivity to it; in spite of his early comments on the importance of testimony, he

writes of the credentials of testimony as though they must be established to the satisfaction of a solitary Cartesian subject. But however we assess this, we will not have responded to the argument that since the concepts of miracle and natural law are necessarily connected, anyone considering testimony to an event they would call a miracle must already concede that it is something that has never happened before. This is at odds with the way in which the concept of miracle is used by those who think it does have application.

Those who believe in miracles do think a miracle is a violation of natural law. But they do not think this entails that it is unprecedented. The healing miracles of Jesus are numerous; and Lazarus was in the tomb as long as Jesus was. It is just conceptually inaccurate to suggest that someone who believes a miracle has occurred must believe nothing like it has ever happened before. But it is also conceptually inaccurate to suggest that such a person does not believe in the rule of natural law. Such a person has an understanding of what a natural law is that permits there to be a “common course of nature” but also miracles: on this understanding, natural law is the order ordained for the world by God, who, as MacIntyre says, is understood to address individuals, or even all humankind, by exceptional events in which he elects to suspend that order.

I wholly agree that to share that understanding of what natural law is, one must share a “system of religion,” at least to the extent of being open to the serious possibility of divine activity. For one who is open to it, even though he or she will not live in momentary expectation of the miraculous, and is theologically prohibited from predicting it, the prior likelihoods are not determined only by the considerations Hume describes. Paley made this very clear in the opening paragraphs of his *Evidences of Christianity*.²⁹ Someone with this view of natural law would not, however, think of any miraculous exceptions to a law in which they came to believe as undermining it; so they would not come to think that fire consumes wood only for the most part, or that people stay dead only most of the time. Miraculous exceptions are scientifically *irrelevant*.

But does this help the case for heeding testimony to miracles? Manifestly, no help can come from an appeal to supposed previous

²⁹. *The Works of William Paley*, vol. 2 (London: Longman, 1838). Paley’s wise comments on Hume’s attack on miracles are not matched by any criticism of Hume’s attack on natural theology in Section XI or the *Dialogues*. This has helped to leave him with a far lower reputation as an apologist than he deserves.

examples of the sort of miracle being attested, if the hearer of the present testimony is not already an adherent of the system of religion that incorporates them. (I leave aside here the very real area of debate among believers about the authenticity of miracles that do not form part of the system's formation, such as the alleged cures at Lourdes.) MacIntyre is clearly right that no evidential quality can overcome the veto of a naturalistic metaphysic or philosophy of science if the hearer subscribes to one; and he is clearly right that Hume's system is naturalistic in this way. I agree with his strictures on such naturalisms, and with the requirements he outlines for a philosophy of science that should replace them. But I am not sure I share his pessimism about the possibility of a putative recognition of the miraculous serving as a test that might establish a system of religion. I take him to be voicing such a pessimism when he says Hume is in the right against apologists who try to use miracles in this way, and when he says that prophetic and apostolic testimony cannot be weighed in the law courts or laboratories. I assume he would also add the history books, and that he would discount the value of defences of the biblical testimony of the kind Paley and others have offered.

Very briefly, it does not seem to me impossible, or even so very difficult, to describe circumstances in which an event, such as a healing, might occur that it would be unreasonable (though possible) for those involved to ascribe to natural causes, and unreasonable (though possible) for them not to view as revelatory or as confirming a revealed truth. The Resurrection appearances are paradigms of such occurrences; and the fact that the accounts of them are uniformly held by unbelievers to be false confirms this estimate of their probative force.

Hume does not deny them this status. He is writing about *testimony* to events that would have it. In spite of the defects in actual miracle testimony that he emphasises in the second part of the section, I cannot see that he shows there cannot be testimony of such quality that only the fact that the event would contravene natural law could make a reasonable hearer hesitate. This would presumably be the situation in which there would be that "mutual destruction of arguments" of which he writes on page 116. What I think we have to scrutinise is a situation in which such mutual destruction has taken place.

I have two things to say about that situation, both of them much too brief. The first is that when there is mutual destruction of arguments, both of the choices, though crucially under-determined, are rational choices. It would be rational to judge that one of the

many known causes of erroneous testimony may still be operating in spite of the witnesses' quality, on the sole ground that the event attested is a miraculous one. But it would also be rational to judge that the miracle did occur, because it would uniquely speak to the hearer's situation and the testimony for its authenticity has no discernible flaws. But although this choice would be rational, it could not be said that the testimony had *established* the system of religion that it had made it *rational to accept*. For this (my second comment) the deciding subject would have to be not the hearer of testimony, but a witness.

I do not think it is clear what Hume would have said about how the wise man would respond when he thinks he is witnessing a miracle himself. But it is important to note that for an event to be one that it is unreasonable for a witness not to ascribe to a special act of God, it would not have to be one of the doctrinally central miracles of the faith. It could still place the witness to it in a position where continued rejection of the faith (and therefore of the reality of its central miracles) was unreasonable, even though it would not be unreasonable for others to hesitate when told of it.

While I have said that I do not think Hume's main argument against miracle testimony involves or requires an explicit appeal to the principle that every event falls under a covering natural law, I have agreed that Hume certainly believes this. He seems to think, both in the *Treatise* and in the later sections of the first *Enquiry*, that he has given an account of our causal inferences that somehow supports this principle. Antony Flew's examination of Hume's treatment of causal necessity is exactly what we need to come to terms with the real merits and defects of this most celebrated part of Hume's system, and to help us get away from the mindless praise that so often substitutes for such an examination.

It is a special pleasure to have Flew connect his discussion of this theme with the notion of factual necessity that I used in my 1960 essay about the cosmological proof. I agree with him about the importance of the Cartesian strand in Hume (at least in the first book of the *Treatise* and therefore in the first *Enquiry*), and I join in his libertarian rejection of Hume's "reconciling project" in *Enquiry* VIII. I think we have some disagreement about the detailed defects of his position on these matters, however. I can bring these out best by attending to that throwaway subsidiary definition of cause in the *Enquiry*, and at his astonishing list of corollaries in *Treatise* I.iii.14. One of the many merits of Flew's essay is the fact that he takes these passages so seriously; the subsidiary definition is an amazing slip, at

the very least, and the corollaries, which are all disturbing and deeply counter-intuitive, are regularly neglected by scholars.

The throwaway definition first: there is indeed no way at all in which “if the first object had not been, the second had never existed” could be equated in meaning, as Hume claims, with the merely sequential relationship summarised in the definition immediately preceding it (which, as Flew says, encapsulates the account of cause as philosophical relation in the nomenclature of the *Treatise*). The howler is so obvious as to need special explanation. Flew suggests that, in unacknowledged recognition of our need as agents to test the extent of our control over our world, Hume is here reintroducing the view he has officially been discrediting—that a cause renders its effect inevitable, or *makes* it happen. On this reading, the relevant counterfactual states, as he puts it, the impossibility of the occurrence of a so-and-so without the subsequent occurrence of a such-and-such. I think Hume’s howler is worse than this. For what he actually says is that the relationship he has defined as (roughly) “Whenever *C*, then *E*” is just as well rendered as “Had there not been *C*, then there would not have been *E*.” I do not deny Flew’s point that a mere de facto sequence fails to sanction the counterfactual assertions we need in practical thinking; but this particular counterfactual is one that is manifestly capable of being false even if a natural law connecting *C* and *E* is established. For it would establish that *C* is a sufficient condition of *E*; and what Hume’s subsidiary definition tells us is that *C* is a *necessary* condition of *E*. Even if *C* necessitated *E*, *E* might, for all we know to the contrary, happen from other causes too. Cancer causes death, but so do a great many other things, unfortunately.

This is a particularly strange howler for Hume to perpetrate in the light of the *Treatise* corollaries. The first of these, after all, is the mind-boggling “all causes are of the same kind, and . . . in particular there is no foundation for that distinction, which we sometimes make betwixt efficient causes, and causes *sine qua non*.” Since he goes on to rubbish formal, material, and final causes, he seems to be suggesting we can dispense with the notion of necessary conditions also. Yet here, in the carefully phrased prose of the *Enquiry*, it reappears.

Perhaps, though, we can read the first corollary merely as arguing that the language of necessary conditions can be dispensed with, and that anything we say in it can be reduced to, or subsumed under, some statement about sufficient conditions. If so, then perhaps the throwaway definition, though manifestly mistaken as a proposed equivalence, is intended to express Hume’s conviction that the suffi-

cient conditions that lead to effects are indispensable for their occurrence. In other words, every event has a cause.

I am myself inclined to think that it is this conviction that is coming through to us in this subsidiary definition. It is interesting that this principle, which Kant felt it so necessary to defend against Hume, is not directly discussed in the *Enquiry*, though Hume appeals to it without argument in his discussion of freedom in Section VIII, where he insists it applies to all our actions. (On this more below.) There is a whole section about it in the *Treatise*, of course: I.iii.3, “Why a Cause is Always Necessary.” This precedes his detailed analysis of induction and causation; and he tells us in this section that the causal principle is neither intuitively nor demonstratively certain. We must, therefore, derive it from experience, and the natural question, then, is how experience gives rise to it. He says that “it will be more convenient to sink this question in the following, *Why we conclude, that such particular causes must necessarily have such particular effects, and why we form an inference from one to another?*” (*Treatise*, 82). He suggests that perhaps the same answer will serve for both questions. But it could not possibly. The question he addresses is that of why a cause must have the effect it does; the question he defers is that of why every event must have a cause. We could live in a world where causes necessitate their effects, but where some events do not have causes at all. In Hume’s epistemology, the only way of legitimating a principle like one of these is by showing that it is a belief our instinctual natures have built up through custom. But here again, we could have built up the one without the other. Hume gives us a profound insight into why we believe in the principle “Same cause, same effect”; he suggests that the enquiry into this will show us why we also believe in the principle “For every event, a cause.” Given their logical independence, it is not surprising that he never delivers on his implied promise to tell us how we come to be committed to the latter.³⁰

What is relevant to the passages that Flew is concerned with here is the fact that Hume does not seem to realise his failure to explain what he has told us he will explain. Both the subsidiary definition and the dogmatic appeals to the causal principle in his discussion of

³⁰. I am repeating myself a little here. See my *Hume* (London: Macmillan, 1975), 57–58, and *David Hume* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1992), 117–20. See also Lewis White Beck, *Essays on Kant and Hume* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1978), 111–29.

freedom suggest he is unconscious of the limits of his explanation of our causal thinking.

I turn now to Flew's discussion of what Hume says about our powers. Our agreement here is closer; and what I want to add is not intended in any way as a proposed correction. I will make use of Flew's distinction between personal power and physical power in making my additions.

Flew is right that it is all prefigured in the second of Hume's causal corollaries in *Treatise* I.iii.14. He has to be right about the extraordinary concluding sentence that tells us the distinction between power and its exercise (a distinction "which we often make," as Hume admits) has no foundation. If Hume meant this to apply to physical power, it would obliterate the distinction between dispositions and their exercise; my car would only have the power to do seventy miles per hour on those occasions when it actually did seventy miles per hour. He clearly has to be thinking of personal power, which, as Flew says, is an ability to do or to abstain from doing something. To say that this power cannot exist without its exercise is to say that I cannot refrain from doing what I do do, or do what I refrain from doing.

To say this is, of course, to deny the freedom of the will, or at least to reject what Hume calls liberty of indifference in *Treatise* II.iii.2. The aggressive discussion of freedom that we find there is more self-consciously at odds with common sense than the self-styled "reconciling project" that replaces it in *Enquiry* VIII. In both places he insists that all we have and all we need is what he calls liberty of spontaneity in the *Treatise*: the absence of interference in the exercise of our choices. "If we choose to remain at rest, we may; if we choose to move, we may," he says in the *Enquiry*. But of course we all believe that sometimes when we choose to remain at rest we might (though we do not) choose instead to move, and that sometimes when we choose to move we might (although we do not) choose instead to remain at rest. The implausibility of his reconciling project comes from his flat denials of the reality of this power, and his claim that we have need only of the sort of power he is willing to concede to us.

In support of his denial of it, he appeals dogmatically to the causal principle. ("It is universally allowed, that nothing exists without a cause of its existence."³¹) I am more and more convinced that Hume does not see how far his accounts of the genesis of our causal

³¹. *Enquiry* VIII, 95.

thinking fall short of legitimating this principle, as distinct from the principle that causes always have the same effects.

If liberty of indifference is the reality that most of us believe in, then the causal principle cannot be legitimated, because it will not be true. For we will have the power to do things that we are not caused to do. Hume regards such a view as incompatible with a science of man, and perhaps, in *his* sense of a science of man, it is. This libertarian position is the one I believe myself. But I wish I felt as confident as Antony Flew does that we all know its truth from experience. I agree with him that Hume's arguments against introspectible powers do not show it to be false, and I wholly concur with him in rejecting the specious blandishments of compatibilism (of which he was himself such a distinguished representative at one time). But the fact that we all believe in the reality of personal powers, and that this belief entails libertarianism, does no more than place the onus on determinists to show us to be wrong. Lots of them are eager to try it. It is remarkable how eager so many theoreticians have been to prove the truth of the nightmare possibility that our conviction of personal powers is illusory; but given that they are, we still need to get into the trenches. Hume's arguments on this subject have been let off far too lightly, and I am happy to have been the partial cause of Flew's criticism of them.

I turn now to David Norton's fine exposition and defence of Hume's mitigated scepticism. He tries to answer two criticisms of Hume, one made by Myles Burnyeat and the other by myself. I begin with his answer to Burnyeat.

In *God and Skepticism*,³² I argued that Burnyeat is right to interpret the Sceptic concept of appearance as including more than sense impressions. For one thing, it includes impressions of value. More importantly, whatever subject matter is at issue, my having or experiencing the appearance is a matter of my having, to some degree, an inclination to *believe* something about the way reality is—about what the Sceptic calls the non-evident. I also argued that having an inclination to believe something is not like having the inclination to perform an action; if it were, then I could have the inclination but make no move to perform the action I am inclined to, that is, I could be inclined to believe that *p*, but not believe it even mildly. (This latter is the Cartesian view of belief as a form of voluntary action.) I argued that Hume is right to say belief is not like this, but is something that

³². Dordrecht: Reidel, 1983; see chaps. 2, 3, and 6.

happens to us. On this understanding, to be inclined to believe something is already to have some degree of the belief that it is so.

If I was right in these two contentions, then when Sextus tells us that the (Pyrrhonian) Sceptic, who lives according to appearances, lives without beliefs, what he says must be false, for you cannot do this without having at least mild beliefs. This does not mean, though, that the Sceptic way that Sextus instantiates is impossible. It means only that Sextus is misdescribing it.³³ What the Sceptic is actually doing is reducing the intensity of his own beliefs by confining himself to those mild beliefs he has to have to live in accordance with the conventional wisdoms of his own society. He manages this by ensuring that any further inclinations he may have, from philosophy, to think that these conventional wisdoms have a grounding in reality are undermined by perusing the negative arguments of those of opposite persuasion, and reaching the point of satiety in the traditional debates about them. Insofar as the Sceptic can correctly be said to have a philosophical program at all, it is one that sees to it that the mild beliefs he has are the ones built into him by convention and history, unescalated in intensity by rational argument.

Sextus has misdescribed a life of ungrounded conventional acquiescence as a life of belieflessness. The life he has misdescribed is livable enough, although a bit on the soft-centred side; it is certainly coherently describable. What is incoherent, and a fortiori unlivable, is Sextus's account of it. (Of course, to misdescribe one's own way in this fashion is a serious philosophical failure: a failure of self-knowledge that is especially serious for someone like Sextus who thinks he is in the Socratic tradition.)

I agree with David Norton that Burnyeat is wrong to say that Hume offers no reasons for saying Pyrrhonism is unlivable. The whole matter of Hume's estimate of Pyrrhonism is muddied by the fact that Hume never shows he has attended to Sextus's emphasis on conventional acquiescence and the accommodation to practice; he seems to equate the Pyrrhonist with the mythical sceptic of Descartes's First Meditation.³⁴ Or perhaps he is even deliberately misrepresenting classical Pyrrhonism for dialectical reasons. What is clear is that his system offers us a "natural history" of how our key

³³. *Ibid.*, 42–43.

³⁴. The classic treatment of the difference between Descartes's sceptic and the real ones of antiquity is Burnyeat's "Idealism and Greek Philosophy: What Descartes Saw and Berkeley Missed," *Philosophical Review* 91 (1982): 3–40.

beliefs arise, and that these beliefs are, as Norton says, beliefs about reality—they transgress, in Pyrrhonist eyes, into the territory of the non-evident. Hume thinks we are programmed to believe. This means our beliefs have causes, rather than reasons. They are ungrounded.

This position seems to me very close in practice to Sextus's actual position, as distinct from his stated one. For on my reading of Sextus's actual position, yielding to an appearance is having at least a mild degree of belief about how reality is. Further, if we look at the doxastic policy that Hume recommends to us, it is also close to Sextus's actual practice, because he tells us to mitigate our beliefs by rehearsing sceptical arguments, to bear in mind that our faculties are limited, and to be aware that the beliefs we have come from causes, not from reasons. I agree that this program, whatever is to be said for it or against it, is indeed livable.

But I remain convinced that Hume's doxastic policy has an obvious limitation: that his recommendation to confine our attentions to science and common life, though certainly one we can follow, is nevertheless arbitrary in a striking way. Norton is right that a way of thinking that is dominated by an arbitrary decision is not unlivable. But it is not principled either, in the way in which I think Hume wanted his and our life to be.

Let me look some more at Norton's very original examination of Hume's account of belief and philosophical doubt. What makes it so helpful is that instead of just repeating that Hume tells us that sceptical doubts cannot dislodge our natural beliefs, he makes it clear that Hume does think they can beneficially modify them. All Hume scholars recognise that Hume thinks belief is involuntary; Norton adds the important recognition that Hume nevertheless recommends us to utilise our philosophical training, if we have it, to doubt some of the things we have no choice but to believe. This gives an unnoticed dimension to the concept of correction involved in Hume's statement in *Enquiry* XII that "philosophical decisions are nothing but the reflections of common life, methodized and *corrected*" (emphasis added). The doubt he recommends has to be doubt of a sort that can coexist with natural belief. It has to be the very philosophical doubt that so infuriated Moore when he gave us that list of truisms that Hume never had any more inclination to contest than Moore had (but refused to say he *knew*). I do not think, however, that it is easy to characterise the nature of philosophical doubt after Moore. How does Norton think Hume did it? The key sentences are: "Seeing that belief is itself involuntary, Hume does not attempt to lead us, as he supposed the Pyrrhonians had, to a complete suspension of belief.

Instead, he attempts to add to the conditions that give rise to belief the salutary and mitigating influence of properly distinguished, philosophical doubts.” He then goes on to illustrate this by reference to the three discussions in the first *Enquiry*, of our beliefs in the regularity of nature, the historicity of miracles, and the existence of God.

In each case, as Norton puts it, Hume shows us that the belief runs well ahead of the evidence. And in each case he has an account, here or elsewhere, of the “natural history” of that belief, that is, the causes that have entrenched it. I have no qualms about what Norton says about these; but his comments prompt these unsystematic ones.

In the first place, Hume calls his position “mitigated scepticism.” But as Norton describes this position, it is a policy for mitigating *belief*. This is not a criticism, for it may very well be just what Hume has in mind. If so, I return to my earlier suggestion that it is a program for keeping belief in check that is not so far in practice from the actual, as distinct from the proclaimed, stance and performance of Sextus.

More seriously, the pattern of criticism plus natural history is very similar in all our three cases; and in each case it shows that while philosophers may think they have good reasons for the belief in question, they do not. The belief comes about through causes, not from reasons. But why does Hume think, as he clearly does, that philosophical examination of the sphere of our natural beliefs is profitable, whereas the philosophical examination of religious and metaphysical themes is not profitable—indeed, that the volumes containing it should be committed to the flames? The reason he offers is more rhetorical than substantive: “While we cannot give a satisfactory reason, why we believe, after a thousand experiments, that a stone will fall, or fire burn; can we ever satisfy ourselves concerning any determination, which we may form, with regard to the origin of worlds, and the situation of nature, from, and to eternity?” (*Enquiry*, 162). This amounts to little more than saying that metaphysics and philosophy of religion are too hard, which is hardly an argument. It is interesting that Hume introduces the paragraph where he recommends this limitation on our intellectual endeavours by saying, “Another species of mitigated scepticism . . . is the limitation of our enquiries.” The use of “another” shows that he is very aware that what he is about to urge upon us is not necessarily connected to his general recommendations about the value of sceptical attitudes.

But the limitation corresponds, of course, to his general negativity on these themes, a negativity that is fundamental in his

philosophical system, however at odds it may be with his other sceptical attitudes.

We have here to connect his position at the close of the *Enquiry* with what he says about the sources of religious beliefs in the *Natural History of Religion*. The message there is that these sources lie within human nature, but are secondary ones. Whatever secondariness consists in, its cash value lies in the fact that these sources are not universal in their power; and also, one may reasonably suppose, can be undermined in the way that the sources of the natural beliefs cannot be, by social conditioning, education, and even (perhaps) by argument. I agree with Norton that Hume does not confuse a belief's being ineradicable with its being true; but in the case of belief in divine (especially miraculous) intervention, Hume clearly thinks the application of sceptical thinking can show the belief to be false, and in the case of belief in divine cosmic design, he thinks it can show it to be vacuous. If the beliefs are assigned merely secondary causes, we can surmise that he thought they could actually be extinguished in ideal circumstances. But he did not suppose that he lived in such circumstances. So although he had already, himself, produced a battery of arguments that could in such circumstances extinguish those beliefs, the power of their sources was still such that his arguments would not be effective. So there is a good case, implied in the closing passages of the *Enquiry*, for eschewing the discussion of these themes altogether. Religious beliefs are false; it is possible to cease to believe them through argument; but this is possible only for some. It is wiser even for one to avoid philosophical discourse about them altogether. Had Hume heeded his own counsel, of course, we would not have had the *Dialogues*. But the fact that he did not print them in his lifetime helps show us why he gave us this advice.

Identity and the Self

(Brennan, Herbert, Lyons, MacIntosh, Madell)

Although the themes addressed in these essays were central ones for me in my earliest published work, I am especially conscious of the fact that the literature has grown enormously since I made my small contributions to it, and that major groundbreaking studies have appeared in recent years. Fortunately, the mandate I have to discharge here does not require me to defend, or even to have, a set of present positions, but only to comment as best I can on colleagues' contributions. The slim volume I published in 1970, which is mentioned amongst those contributions, is too clearly antediluvian for me to

have to do more than say where I have changed my mind on any matters relevant to this mandate. I can't say quite the same, of course, about the chapter in *Butler*³⁵ that Jack MacIntosh criticises, and will say a little in its defence when the time comes.

A small autobiographical comment first, however. When I wrote *Survival and Disembodied Existence*,³⁶ I was outside the church, and when I wrote *Butler*, I was back inside. The philosophical difficulties about survival that I thought I had shown to exist did not go away because of this. The developments in the philosophical debates about personal identity that have taken place in recent years have not made these difficulties seem less serious to me; rather the contrary. And the belief in life after death has come to seem more and more central to the claims of the major religions of the world, most particularly Christianity. John Hick makes one reason for this clear in his essay, and I have argued for others.³⁷ The difficulties in the belief in disembodied survival (which Antony Flew, from whom I first learned their importance, has lately recast in classic form³⁸) do not seem to me to have been effectively addressed, but to be commonly dismissed as mere sceptical cavils over something that everyone obviously understands; and although I am one of those who are impressed by some of the phenomena, like near-death experiences, that greatly increase our natural tendency to resort to that belief, I do not find, when I look back at that early volume, that its manifest datedness has done anything to make these difficulties go away.

In *Butler* I was attempting to address some of the difficulties in the doctrine of resurrection, which I had earlier argued to be less obviously insurmountable. My attempt was based not only on my reading of Butler, but also on the great help I had got from an essay by Bob Herbert, who returns to this theme here.³⁹

I said that the Christian doctrine of resurrection, as I was interpreting it, could be thought of as a special case of the belief in reincarnation, as least as far as the theory of personal identity is

³⁵. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985.

³⁶. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970.

³⁷. See my "Religious Belief and Life After Death," in *Philosophy of Religion: Proceedings of the Eighth International Wittgenstein Symposium*, pt. 2, ed. Wolfgang L. Gombocz (Vienna: Holder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1984), 37–45.

³⁸. In *The Logic of Mortality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987).

³⁹. The earlier essay is chap. 6 of his *Paradox and Identity in Theology* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979).

concerned, amounting to the prediction of a one-time reincarnation into an eschatological state, rather than into the world of the previous life. Hence MacIntosh's strictures on reincarnation certainly bear directly on resurrection, as he says. There are those who think that the doctrine of the resurrection of the body has to be replaced, for Christians, by some form of belief in disembodied survival. There are those, larger in number, who do not think the one should replace the other, but think that the Christian tradition not only has embraced both, but needs to. Unless my earlier arguments, and those of Flew, have answers, I do not see either route as open, and the logical coherence of the view MacIntosh attacks assumes a doctrinal importance.

In this part, I cannot take the essays in sequence as I have done hitherto, since they include two pairs of opposites. Herbert makes a cumulative case for a move that MacIntosh warns us is absurd. Brennan argues for the thesis that there can be unowned experiences, because persons are psychological systems into which fortuitous psychological items may fail to fit, whereas Madell insists that what makes an experience mine rather than yours is that it is mine, simpliciter, and Brennan identifies this as a putative difficulty for his neo-Humean bundle theory, at least in regard to synchronic unity. Insofar as I have a comment on one essay in either of these pairs, it bears directly on the arguments of the other one.

I begin, however, with Bill Lyons's essay. My remarks on it will, I hope, have the function of clarifying my attitudes on some of the wider issues that lurk in the background of the identity literature, but which I have not mentioned so far.

I am very grateful for his lucid guidance through a series of debates in which I find it difficult to know my way about. (I experienced the same pleasure and instruction when reading his *Emotion*⁴⁰ and *The Disappearance of Introspection*.⁴¹) Much of my difficulty with the debates he analyses has always come from a lack of sympathy with what seem to me to be metaphysical assumptions that I see no reason to share. While the mediaeval Aristotelian flow-chart of intentionality that he describes at the start of his essay may indeed strike the contemporary philosopher or psychologist as bizarre, my own intuitions, which are no doubt infected by Cartesianism, lead me to react in this same way to theories that are overtly materialist and have

⁴⁰. *Emotion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

⁴¹. *The Disappearance of Introspection* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986).

positivist and behaviourist ancestry. I can recall an initial bafflement in my graduate student days when I heard a philosopher say he was about to embark on a series of discussions of “aboutness.” I recall nothing of the content of those discussions, but of course my bafflement was foolish, since it is this directedness, relevance, and deliberate attention that is one of the crucial marks of the mental, and was being backhandedly alluded to in all those old debates about whether or not matter can think. While the particular occasions of recent debate, such as the development of what we question-beggingly call “artificial intelligence,” are new, the core phenomena whose reality, or underlying structure, is at issue are not, nor is the philosophical concern about them. Intentionality is self-evidently a feature of our conscious experience (even our day-dreaming), so a theory that holds it to be merely a feature of our common-sense vocabulary either will entail the denial of the very occurrence of such experience, which is the ultimate in philosophical hardihood; or will entail that it is wholly epiphenomenal, which seems counter to plain experience;⁴² or will be driven to identify experiences and brain processes, with all the problems attendant on a belief in contingent identity. Lyons brings out very well the difficulties in Fodor’s representational theory of mind, which seems to attribute the relevant features of consciousness directly to the brain, although I think it is unfortunate to combine the strong point that our common-sense language was evolved without knowledge of neurophysiology with the much less plausible suggestion that it only provides us with “quick-and-easy” understanding of humans for “ordinary folk.” If that suggestion were true, why would the complex mappings of the conceptual schemes embedded in this language that have loomed so large in contemporary philosophy of mind (and of which *Emotions* is so successful an example) be such hard work to do, and reveal so many subtleties? Without having made a study of attempts to “biologise” intentionality, I hazard the comment, close in intent to the one Lyons quotes from Snowdon, that an account of the successful functioning and evolutionary value of our cognitive states, although it explains their widespread presence, tells us nothing about the nature of those processes that have thus been consolidated. (I incline to think, in this connection, that Swinburne has independently raised some very

⁴². I concur with Madell in thinking epiphenomenalism is “almost self-evidently unacceptable.”

tricky questions about the plausibility of evolutionary explanations of consciousness in any case.⁴³)

I have not attempted to carry forward the debates that Lyons has interpreted; I have made these remarks in order to clarify the stance from which I approach some arguments that are directed to positions I have taken in the past. While I am still of the view that there are serious difficulties in the way of the concept of disembodied existence, I have never been inclined to adopt any form of materialism, or, for that matter, verificationism, though the arguments in *Survival and Disembodied Existence* have seemed to some to give aid to both positions.

I turn to Andrew Brennan's attempt to domesticate the apparently alien suggestion that there might be ownerless experiences. This view has a noble ancestry, going back to the original creator of bundle theories. In the *Treatise*, at I.iv.2 (207 in Selby-Bigge), we get:

As to the first question; we may observe, that what we call a *mind*, is nothing but a heap or collection of different perceptions, united together by certain relations, and suppos'd, tho' falsly, to be endow'd with a perfect simplicity and identity. Now as every perception is distinguishable from another, and may be consider'd as separately existent; it evidently follows, that there is no absurdity in separating any particular perception from the mind; that is, in breaking off all its relations, with that connected mass of perceptions, which constitute a thinking being.

I have to admit to not being sure whether I understand this claim of Hume's or not. In his system, which is at least nominally based on a science of the mind that takes perceptions as the basic units, it has to be assumed that we can intelligibly speak about these perceptions in the first instance and then ask how we (!) come to believe in the reality of things and minds. Hume is merely drawing out a consequence of his own assumptions; but it is not obviously an intelligible one. And there is a major difference between the position he expresses and the one that Brennan seeks to defend. Whatever Hume's private opinions may have been about the relation between mind and body, his system requires at the point where he says this that the perceptions he says can exist without being parts of any mind can be supposed to exist without there being bodies, even though he does not think we are capable of seriously doubting the

⁴³. Richard Swinburne, *The Evolution of the Soul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 186–96.

reality of bodies. In other words, he is speaking here (as I was in the passage Brennan quotes at the outset of his essay) of the intelligibility of there being experiences that are not only unowned by any mind, but unattached to any body. Although the sentences Brennan quotes from me are quite general, their context was one in which I was particularly concerned to discount the possibility of there being experiences that had no physical connection, in order to show that there are no purely mental conditions that can provide for the identity of the subject to whom they must, by hypothesis, belong. It is interesting that Brennan seems to confine himself here, as he did in *Conditions of Identity*,⁴⁴ to arguing that there can well be experiences that lack the psychological connectedness that integrates experiences into one human life. I do not think that I wanted to contest what he is concerned to affirm, given what he says in the larger work (241) about the senselessness of the idea of disembodiment. But I am spurred by what he says, and the sort of argument he mounts in favour of his claim, to look again at something I said in *Survival and Disembodied Existence* that Geoffrey Madell objects to, and which I now find unsatisfactory.

First, though, a general remark about the kind of argument that Brennan offers. Those who argue for a latter-day bundle theory and say, as Brennan does, that the unity that persons have, and that puzzled Hume, is something that can have degrees in a way that identity cannot, will naturally concern themselves with the fact that human lives commonly show greater or lesser degrees of integration and coherence. It is because he argues, very resourcefully, along lines of this kind that Brennan is able to suggest that an “unowned” experience might be an experience that occurs within a human life but is lacking such integration and does not figure in any coherent narrative of that life. Now, such a conception of human existence, which we may well enough call a coherence theory of self-identity, has one great advantage: it enables us to connect the philosophical problem of personal identity very naturally with some of the less obviously philosophical uses of the notion of self-identity, uses in which, for example, we may say that people whose culture has been destroyed by industrialisation have lost their sense of identity. Very roughly and generally, we think of identity in this less clearly philosophical sense as the presence of a high degree of integration of one’s desires and choices and emotional attachments. Again, we can think of a choice or

⁴⁴. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955.

an emotional response, or an experience, as being unattached to or at odds with the pattern of choices that constitute the person I now, or for the most part, am; or with which, as we very naturally express it, I identify. My general worry about theories that attempt to analyse the numerical identity of the person in terms of connectedness and related concepts is that they lead to a blurring of the distinction between the two sorts of identity I have distinguished: between the one that is a given fact about each of us and the one that most ethical and religious systems give us instruction to seek. Personal integration is an achievement; but it is an achievement that a person can fail to attain, or may attain for a time and then lose, or may attain in one way for a period and then manifest in another way. Such major personal successes or failures or transformations, though describable in the language of self-identity, are successes or failures or transformations *within a life*, and do not constitute breaks in the numerical identity of the individuals to whom, or within whose lives, they take place.

I take as my most convenient example of this the cases of conversion or transformation after therapy that Brennan mentions in his Afterword, and the fact that he expresses in the sentence “The system’s capacity for self-modification, and the effect of various external impacts, will also vary from one person to another.” Yes, indeed; but this does not mean (and his distancing from Locke here shows that Brennan does not take it to mean) that breakdown and suicide, for example, are one and the same. When I look back with mortification to some regular pattern of behaviour in my past with which I cannot now “identify” and which I am wholly confident I cannot any longer repeat, and when I identify a short-term lapse into such earlier patterns as a temporary aberration that no longer represents the real me in the way it would have then, on such occasions I feel at a distance from the earlier Penelhum, and although I may devoutly wish that that person was not me, it (necessarily) was. And it would have been if I had managed to deal with the unpalatable recollections by forgetting them. Perhaps Augustine made a silly fuss in later life about stealing the fruit from the pear tree when he was a boy; that is a matter of moral judgement. But he was not confused in thinking that that earlier self was *himself*.

Now, an earlier experience or attitude or behaviour pattern that I now distance myself from might well be said to be integrated in a quite strong way into the bundle that I am over time, just because I still go on about it or have repressed it. This no doubt gives us a reason to say, even within the confines of a bundle theory, that to

describe someone before and after major spiritual or ethical change as an earlier and a later self is to posit a metaphysical substitution when there has been a moral change within a single life. But this is not decisive, since it merely weighs one form of integration against another in a contest that makes some form of integration constitutive of personal unity. If such unity is indeed a matter of degree, then a decision about personal identity is a matter of judgement, on which reasonable people can differ. While I do not deny that my own strong disposition to reject this consequence has moral sources, I would offer as a reason for it, and for the moral judgements implied in it, the fact that such matters of judgement arise only in special cases like those of multiple personality, and that in attempting to represent cases of moral development or regression in this way one is involved in serious self-deception.⁴⁵

The reason why there is moral appeal in the dissociative move that the bundle theory (in one form) would allow us to make, is of course that we may feel a person is entitled to be freed from the burden of a past from which he or she may now have moved forward. But we can only recognise this fact, and then proceed to misdescribe it, if we can tell that it *is* the past of this person rather than some other. And this involves making use of the common evidences or criteria of identity that enable us to decide these things. These depend on the fact that the person whose past we say it is or was, is the person who has the continuing body in which the actions or attitudes were manifested, or within which the experiences were undergone. I have produced no argument that proves one cannot make the dissociative move if this is recognised, but the onus is on the bundle theorist to show that it can be made.

This brings me back by a roundabout route to the question of ownerless experiences. For the type of experiences that Brennan offers as candidates for this role can only be considered for it if the standard of bodily identity is invoked. I want to invoke it and say that experiences that lack those forms of psychological connection that integrate them into the system that a person creates for him- or herself are unintegrated but not unowned. They belong to the person

⁴⁵ I have tried to make part of the case for a position of this sort in three papers: "The Importance of Self-Identity," *Journal of Philosophy* 68 (1971): 667–78; "Self-Identity and Self-Regard," in *The Identities of Persons*, ed. Amélie Rorty (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976), 253–80; and "Human Nature and External Desires," *The Monist* 62 (1979): 304–19.

in whose body they occur. That human being would not, admittedly, be qualified for the title of "person" at all if his or her experiences were not to some important degree integrated into a system; but this does not eliminate from his or her biography those mental phenomena that do not connect with that system.

I want to turn to the three "supposed truths" that Brennan says a bundle theorist of the person need not deny. On the apparent disunity of my simultaneous mental contents, he says that systemic connections between them may not be a simple matter of immediately perceivable causal connections. True enough; but this seems to shift the problem of synchronic unity onto that of diachronic unity. He insists that complex experiences may not be complexes *of* experiences. Again, true enough; but he seems to cash this out in terms of the varied physiological sources of the complex experience, which seems to me a roundabout way of telling us that what holds the apparently disparate elements together is the fact that they all have a base in the same physical organism. And he says, wisely, that fetuses and babies are probably subjects of happenings that should only count as experiences if they are had by subjects with a conceptual apparatus that can integrate them. Here I see no reason, except the requirements of the bundle theory itself, for not saying that such subjects do indeed have experiences, but that they are not integrated because the subjects have not yet matured into persons capable of integrating them. (One limiting case of integration is the perception of some experience one has, for example, a surprising emotional reaction, as lacking meaning or integration.) Again, I do not want to question the truth that people have mental lives that exhibit a "microcosmic urge" to system, and that a being lacking this urge would not be a person at all. But such a being might have experiences, just as persons may have some experiences that they fail to integrate. The only reason to talk of such experiences as unowned is that one has defined the identity of a person in terms of the persistence of a system he or she has built up, rather than in terms of the life of which such a system is a short- or long-term feature.

What Geoffrey Madell says about the unity of the person could hardly be in sharper contrast both with Brennan's views on self-identity and with the naturalistic understandings of intentionality that Lyons describes. I cannot do more than touch on some of his arguments and the very healthy discomforts that they generate. Most of what I say will be directed towards the first part of his essay, in particular his arguments relating to unity, individuation, and embodi-

ment and his claim that we need to allow into our ontology the specifically subjective property “being me” and the person “I.”

In *Survival and Disembodied Existence*, I argued that it is not possible to spell out coherently what it is for two experiences to belong to one and the same person without reference to the body that the person has. I concentrated for the most part on problems of reidentification rather than on the ascription of simultaneous experiences to the same person, that is, to problems of individuation. Madell refers to the one place in the argument where I commented on the latter (74); and he is indeed right that what I said there is worryingly implausible. It is here that his own position seems, in contrast, to be strongest. Let us take an imaginary case that is not supposed to be that of a disembodied soul, but of me reading a page of print, and at the same time hearing a distant and unrelated noise (say, of an aircraft droning overhead) and feeling an unrelated and undistracting glow of warmth from the hot coffee I drank a few moments back. These are a group of readily distinguishable experiences that, even if they can be related easily enough, might very well not have happened together as they have. But the complex does indeed yield a familiar example of what in our jargon I can call synchronic identity. Someone else might have had one or two of these experiences but not the third, but it was in fact I who had them. What sort of fact is this? Madell says, with great plausibility, that it is the simple fact that all three experiences are *mine*. A familiar case like this seems to be the sort of place where we want to start in making sense of Kant’s famous but obscure claim that all our experience involves us, necessarily, in accompanying the individual phenomena of sensation, imagination, and thought by the “I think.” For it is only the potentially self-conscious awareness that *I* happen to be experiencing these three things together that seems to connect them and make them all three mine at this time, rather than someone else’s. Of course, the fact that they are all had here and now because of the state and orientation of my body helps explain *why* I am having these three together now, but it cannot, surely, be maintained that this is what *constitutes* their being all mine now? That is just given, is it not? For I cannot have this sense, or make this judgement, that these experiences are now one and all mine, and be wrong about this. After all, although it is easy enough to suppose that another person, not I, could have had the glow-experience in conjunctions with other experiences he or she had, and I merely had the other two, it is not intelligible to suppose that I could have thought, at the time, that I had all three of these experiences when in

fact I only had two of them. The sense that they are one and all mine does not merely seem to be given, but to be somehow infallible.

I have to accept almost all of this. But what it seems to me to show is that I cannot suppose a group of simultaneous experiences to be mine when they are not, not that what their being mine consists in must be the fact that I (even infallibly) claim them to be, or that what their being mine consists in cannot be their simultaneous relatedness to my body. I think I am here following a line of reasoning that derives from the Paralogisms. Just as the demonstrable necessity of ascribing a group of experiences connected in one judgement does not entail the rationalist's conclusion that the self is a simple immaterial substance (though thus far it *might* be), so it does not entail that it will not have all the physical properties that my body has. Similarly, the fact that I cannot be mistaken in judging that the experiences I am having together now are all mine does not prove that their being mine cannot consist in their all being related to the body that I have.

But the natural question is, Why would one suppose that it *does* consist in this, when, as Madell rightly emphasises, neither this fact nor other related facts are given in the experiences themselves, and when the whole matter of body-mind connections is as shrouded in metaphysical mystery as ever?

The answer to this question lies in the problems that arise when we turn from synchronic to diachronic identity. For here it seems manifest that the infallibility I conceded to the judgement of ownership of experiences vanishes. And it is through this route that I must complete the answer to his criticism that if bodily identity were constitutive of personal identity, I would have to establish the bodily connection of my experiences before I could know them to be my own, which is absurd.

If we consider the sense of an experience's being mine that one has when trying to recall the past, then the fact that one cannot be in error about the ownership of the present recollection or representation is irrelevant to questions about the ownership of the *past* experience. Certainly I recall it as mine, and it is an essential feature of experience-recollections that I do this. But it is also one of the hazards of memory in fallible beings. For I can so recall something that I did not experience in the past; yet my thinking I remember it entails my remembering it as mine. Here the very fact that precludes an appeal to bodily identity in the determination of the ownership of present experiences precludes the possibility of memory, with its built-in sense of mineness, being a guarantee of the ownership of past experiences. To make this point we do not need to delve into science fic-

tion cases of bodily transfer or invoke supposed *q*-memories. It is enough to recognise that we often think we recall events that did not happen at all. This is enough to show that although, when it is genuine, memory is a form of access to my own past, the mere occurrence of putative memories cannot be a guarantee of the reality of a supposed past experience of mine, and a fortiori cannot be a guarantee of its having been an experience of *mine*. As I argued in the early book, and as many others have argued at least since Butler, the very distinction between real and apparent memory requires some independent standard or criterion of identity between the owner of the remembered event and the owner of the remembering of it. For me to be right or wrong about a past experience's being mine, my own identity cannot be understood in terms of the epistemologically vulnerable sense of its ownership.

This does not mean that I commonly have to determine by application of the bodily criterion of identity that a past experience was mine. But it does mean that I, or others, may have to resort to this criterion in order to determine the truth of the conviction or claim that the sense that I had that experience represents. This does not show of itself that the identity that the correctness of this claim presupposes is constituted by the identity of my body; and there is a serious gap at this point in the argument of the earlier book. But the identity of my body is the obvious candidate. And whatever does constitute that identity is constitutive of the nature of the "I" who claims those experiences as its own, even though when we make this claim that nature is, as Kant made clear, unspecified.

I do not know, at this point, how far this difficulty in Madell's argument undermines the many penetrating things he says about theories that, in his view, systematically omit the key fact of claimed ownership that is at the core of intentionality. If what I have said is true, I cannot think that embodiment is a merely contingent fact about intentional subjects; but this, of course, does not show that the self, in Madell's language, is to be identified with an object in the world.

I turn now to the essays by Bob Herbert and Jack MacIntosh, with, first, a few remarks about the views of my own to which they are responding.

In *Survival and Disembodied Existence*, I argued from a meagre diet of puzzle cases (a much richer feast of these being now available in the literature) that the doctrine of resurrection, if presented without covert ancillary appeals to a belief in disembodied survival, has a curious status. It amounts to a prediction that at a future time,

when each of us will have been dead long since, a number of persons will appear, each one claiming to be someone formerly deceased and each equipped with putative memories to fit the past of the person he or she claims to be. There will be one-one correspondence, in the sense that there will be only one such successor, at most, for each deceased person. I claimed that such a situation was one in which we could identify each successor with the person he or she claimed to be, but that in view of the time gap (in which it can be supposed the bodies of the deceased will have been destroyed), such identification is no more than an option. It would be mandatory only if there were, as there would not be, bodily continuity from the deceased to the successor in each case. A negative decision would have the result that the successors would be classed as replicas of their predecessors, and their apparent memories would have to be judged to be forms of what I there called retrocognition; most writers on self-identity would now use Shoemaker's language and call them *q*-memories.

This estimate of the doctrine of resurrection paralleled a brief analysis I gave of the claim that some persons are reincarnations of previously deceased people: for example, that Ruth Simmons was the reincarnation of Bridey Murphy. Cases like this could, I argued, be reasonably described as cases of reincarnation, but could also be described as cases of retrocognition, or *q*-memory, alone.

In *Butler*, I returned to the doctrine of resurrection, and attempted, as I saw the matter, to strengthen it in two ways. First, I argued that in a situation where such a dramatic cosmic event had taken place, no one would in fact hesitate about the choice of description and nomenclature that would be presented to them. Second, I argued that those, like Butler, who anticipate a resurrection have in fact been thinking with a different conception or understanding of what a person is: one in which death is not the destruction of the person but the end of a phase that is followed by an empty gap, during which the person has not ceased to *be*, but is in a state of total interim abeyance. (Flew has dismissed this as "incoherently Heideggerian."⁴⁶) The events of the resurrection-event would, under that concept, constitute the onset of the final phase. I took these suggestions to be reasons for saying that the eschatological predictions of the Christian tradition were predictions of events that, if they were to happen on a sudden, it would be unreasonable, though not impossible, to describe in language that did not imply identification of the

⁴⁶. See *The Logic of Mortality*, 14.

successors with the deceased. An unbeliever should say that these events are not going to happen, not suggest that if they did happen they still would not constitute the resurrection of the dead.

My emphasis on the different conception of the person present in the secular and the Christian understanding of persons and their futures not only owed much to my detailed reflections on Butler,⁴⁷ but was also indebted to Robert Herbert's exploration in *Paradox and Identity in Theology*.⁴⁸ His present essay deepens that exploration, and I particularly welcome those features of it that help to offset the Heideggerian appearance of the idea of gap-inclusiveness by showing that there are some familiar occasions when, if I may so express myself, nothingness does not merely noth, but makes a real contribution.

If Herbert and I are right, then the Christian prediction of a future resurrection after a time gap would be an admittedly special use of a form of reidentification that has precedents. It is still startling, and to the secular mind fantastic, but it is not, by our reasoning, absurd. But we have to contend now with the rigorous and elegant arguments of MacIntosh's essay; if these are sound, then it is indeed absurd. Herbert concludes with some responses to an earlier essay where MacIntosh has argued similarly. I find here, also, that my reflections are similar to Herbert's. I shall offer one or two minor comments first. I did use "bodily identity" where others write of bodily continuity. I also did say that bodily continuity was a necessary condition of personal identity, but one that might be judged to be satisfied in the resurrection case. He is right to ask what I am about here. The classical Christian declaration is that there will be resurrection of the body; when Paul writes of these things (in a historical context when the eschatological fulfilment was expected soon), he predicts that the dead will be *raised*. These affirmations seem to imply that those who rise will rise with, or in, the bodies that were buried. The pictures in the medieval dooms, and the special revulsion directed against body-snatchers, clearly resulted from this assumption. Other things Paul says do not fit this very well, but that is not our subject here. What is our subject is the fact that in an era when many, if not most, of the bodies of our ancestors no longer exist to *be* raised, a believer in the resurrection must assume that the

⁴⁷. There are some interesting new explorations of what he says on it in the papers by T.A. Roberts and Anders Jeffner in *Joseph Butler's Moral and Religious Thought: Tercentenary Essays*, ed. Christopher Cunliffe (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

⁴⁸. See chap. 6.

bodies of the risen will not, *prima facie*, be numerically identical with the bodies of the dead. I say “*prima facie*” because if it is possible to make the decision that the putative resurrectees are indeed the deceased, it might be a possible consequence of that decision that just as the resurrectees would have been judged to be the deceased in a later phase, so also their bodies would have been judged to be the deceased’s bodies in a later phase. In *that* sense, one could hold that there is bodily identity in resurrection. This would open a gap between resurrection and reincarnation, where the non-identity of the earlier and later bodies is part of the doctrine. But of course, speaking of bodily identity in the resurrection case is something that could emerge only after a supposed decision that the cross-temporal identification could be and should be made. It could not, without gross cheating, be said to be a condition of identity that could be judged satisfied before such a decision. Before such a decision, the evidential situation is on a par with that present also in imagined cases of reincarnation.

Speaking of reincarnation, Michael Stoeber has recently argued, very plausibly, that identity is required only for some versions of reincarnation teachings, namely those that are, as he puts it, retributive; and that some doctrines of rebirth would be adequately served with nothing more than *q*-memories. This is not the place to explore this, but even if MacIntosh’s critiques of reincarnation are correct, karma and non-retributive rebirth may still be coherent teachings.⁴⁹ Not resurrection, though, since identity is clearly essential to it.

MacIntosh thinks that reincarnation-with-identity is impossible, for this reason. (I here attempt an informal rendering of his case.) In my outline of the resurrection prediction, I stipulated that there is not to be more than one successor for each of the deceased who rise. This stipulation has no grounds except the fact that if, in any particular case, there were two such successors, the case for identifying either with a previous deceased person would be equivalent, and this would lead to the result that each was therefore identical to the other, which is absurd; hence, neither could be successor. This argument goes back, of course, to Bernard Williams’s puzzle case about

⁴⁹ Michael Stoeber, “Personal Identity and Rebirth,” *Religious Studies* 26 (1990): 493–500. See also Raymond Martin, “Survival of Bodily Death: A Question of Values,” *Religious Studies* 28 (1992): 165–84.

Charles, Robert, and Guy Fawkes.⁵⁰ MacIntosh utilises a version of this reduplication argument, maintaining that the stipulation does not save the coherence of the reincarnation prediction. It fails, he claims, because if it is true, in the opinion of someone who makes such a prediction, that a future person, R_1 , who is qualified in the necessary way with character traits, putative memories, and so on, would for that reason *be* some long-dead person, O , then it is also true that if there were, instead, some different but equally qualified person, R_2 , then R_2 would, by parity of reasoning, be O instead. But unless one is willing to deny the necessity of identity, it follows from this that were R_1 and R_2 both to exist in the future, both would be O , and therefore each would be identical with the other, which by hypothesis they would not be.

To stipulate that only one of them will in fact exist and not the other does not remove the absurdity, but merely puts it into the subjunctive. So the step of identification is not a theoretical option.

As I see the matter at present, it does not look as though the argument can be evaded by appealing to the conceptual points that Herbert and I have made about the religious conception of the person, or about gap-inclusive entities, or to the rather uncertain conceivability of the phoenix. These would at best enable us to translate the imagined forecasts into predictions about the earlier and later phases of persons; but, to revert to the variables of MacIntosh's essay, if we were to encounter a being R_1 who gave all indications of being the post-gap phase of O according to the religious understanding of what persons are, the fact that it is no harder to imagine a second being, R_2 , similarly qualified would present us with the same theoretical obstacle to the application of that religious concept. What I used to think was possible but not necessary is, by this argument, rendered impossible: impossible because *arbitrary*.

Where can I go from here? I will first look at the unappetising theoretical responses that MacIntosh and his earlier respondents have discussed. Only one of these seems worth considering.

The multi-occupancy thesis, which MacIntosh finds of interest, though not here, is clearly as guilty of "ad hocery" as the arbitrary stipulation that there are to be no post-gap duplicates, although it does have a potential role in those cases where we feel strongly inclined to talk of multiple centres of consciousness in ordinary life. We

⁵⁰. "Personal Identity and Individuation," in Williams, *Problems of the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973).

might reasonably speculate that those who share a body might escape from this calamity in the next world.

But it is not this I am tempted to consider, since what would work for a very small number of special cases becomes an absurd device for *all* cases. What is, I think, worth some reflection is the abandonment of the “Only x and y principle,” as Noonan calls it.⁵¹ This is the principle that only facts about the candidates being identified are relevant to their identification, and that facts about other beings cannot be relevant. I take MacIntosh’s quotation from Wiggins to be an attempt to reinforce this principle by highlighting the supposed absurdity of flouting it. In the somewhat light-headed world of speculation that discussions of personal identity inhabit, I do not find myself as struck by absurdity here as Wiggins and MacIntosh do. In a world in which there were q -memories as well as memories, there would be inhabitants with pasts that were devoid of the events they q -remembered. In what way can we not take such a possibility seriously? A world in which there were duplicate successors would be a world in which some people really did fail to *have* predecessors, and would fail, perhaps (if we follow Davidson and MacIntosh), really to be people at all, because these things depended on facts about others as well as on facts about themselves. Those of us who have had the experience of losing competitions because our remarkable personal merits were matched by others can at least understand the idea of a contest in which no one can get the prize because no one can stand out enough in such a strong field. I could not take this very seriously as a contest, but it could happen. I do not find the “Only x and y principle” so obviously self-evident that I cannot contemplate accepting this as a theoretical consequence. But this does lead to a possibility that I hope is worth more truly serious consideration. For I have not said anything about the unique-successor stipulation I am defending to fend off MacIntosh’s charge that I am merely holding on to it because it is convenient. With reluctance (born of having myself heaved the standard sighs when other thinkers, even great ones like Locke, have appealed to divine goodness), I want to come back to the miraculousness of MacIntosh’s title.

He says, somewhat to my surprise, that we could allow identity not only in cases where there was continuity instead of gappiness, but also in cases where there were laws of nature that people could enter matter transmitters and be matched by replicas (my word here)

⁵¹. Noonan, “The Possibility of Reincarnation,” *Religious Studies* 26 (1990): 483–92.

in other places as they disappeared, or disappear and be matched after time gaps by such replicas. Mere reference to God's power would not do, but apparently if duplication were prevented by natural law, it would. The emphasis here is on there being independent reasons for thinking duplication would not occur. Otherwise, his briefly sketched examples are high-tech versions of speculations he rejects when (for example) Hick uses them. He presumably rejects Hick's use of them because he judges them to be mere stipulations introduced to avoid difficulties.

I am reluctant to offer a theory that needs much more reflection. But, that said, it seems to me that although we are clearly outside the sphere of ascertained natural law here, there might be a place, when coherence and intelligibility are the issues rather than truth, for a suggestion made by Butler. He suggests, in response to deists who held that a God who created a law-governed world would not perform miracles, that there might be laws of more than one kind; that there might be supernatural as well as natural laws,⁵² or that God's "miraculous interpositions" might follow "general laws of wisdom." Hitherto I have only been able to interpret this suggestion as a claim that God has consistent *policies*, and it certainly must include that. But it might also include, now I think about it, a hint of a further suggestion: that if we were privy to those policies (through revelation, perhaps, or even natural theology), we might be able to discern an overall cosmic economy in which, for example, the persons whom we know to be subject to natural laws here and now are also subject to other general laws of wisdom that, when formulated, require us to define their natures in a way that allows eschatological reappearances. This would not, in the context of the present argument, be a mere convenient stipulation, since those who were inclined to make it would base their inclination on other forms of experience that led them to think this view of human personality was the correct one. So they would view their eschatological predictions about the futures of persons as inferences from the tradition's developing insights into God's overall plan—a plan that would preclude the post-mortem creation of multiple successors, since that phase of creaturely existence would be one that required, for all of those who lived in it, prior accumulations of guilt, merit, and moral development, but would require futures for some or all of the dead, since the moral developments possible to the living here and now are

⁵². The suggestion is made in the *Analogy of Religion*, pt. 2, chap. 4.

insufficient to fulfil the promises made to them in their prior encounters with God. This is how the belief in resurrection would seem to have arisen in the Judeo-Christian religious tradition in any case. Someone who rejects that tradition cannot, of course, do other than say that the supposed awareness of supernatural economy implied in this suggestion is false, and that in default of any such information, the unique-survivor stipulation is baseless and therefore arbitrary.

I am drawing here on the agreement between my own thinking and Bob Herbert's, and on a suggestion he made in an earlier essay about replication and divine intentions.⁵³ As I read his concluding response to MacIntosh's earlier work on this theme, I find him making two appeals. The first is to the point MacIntosh himself concedes in his penultimate paragraph—that what it is possible to allow as identical is a function of laws of nature; as Herbert puts it, it is a function of the kind of things human beings are. The second is an appeal to God's promises. What I have said also combines these two, since only by making the specifically theological appeal does one offer a substantive reason for stipulating that there are not to be multiple successors to the dead. Without this specifically theological input, this stipulation looks like no more, to use a phrase from Ryle, than clapping a foreign concept on the head of phenomena that are already fully accommodated within our conceptual scheme without it. To be more than this, the reference to what God will do has to be simultaneously a claim about what the nature of persons is—that they are creatures of a God of a certain kind, a kind whose nature precludes duplication. This claim has religious, not scientific, sources.

As I say, I greatly dislike ending up by arguing a philosophical point in this way. In reflecting on the confrontation between Christian and secular world-views, I have always been struck both by the fact that the believer and unbeliever share a common, lived, and scientifically understood world, and by the radical differences between their overall interpretations of it. I have been inclined to describe those differences as being due to the Christian's *adding* certain beliefs on to those that he or she shares with the unbeliever. But we come here, at a religiously fundamental place, to a difference that cannot be described like that. The Christian is not merely someone who thinks life will go on longer later, but someone who thinks a person is a different sort of being from the one that the

⁵³. *Paradox and Identity in Theology*, 149ff.

unbeliever perceives. On the Christian view, the person is a creature with a certain destiny, determined in its possibilities and options from the foundation of the world. To the unbeliever this will indeed appear as an unwarranted addition to what we can all of us learn about what people actually are. But the fact that the replica objection that has appeared again in our dispute here has seemed to bother so few believers (or unbelievers) is due to the fact that secular understandings of the person represent a radical *subtraction* from a world-view that everyone in Christendom once held, at least nominally.

Unlike the belief in the immortality of the soul, the belief in resurrection is wholly religious in its origin. Jack MacIntosh's argument has forced me to come clean and recognise that its logical credentials depend on those of the religious tradition from which it comes. I hope he feels that this is at least a minor positive consequence of letting that paragraph go into the penultimate section of his essay.

I end as I began, with warmest gratitude to all the contributors, not only for their contributions but for their patience in waiting while I thought about those contributions; and to Hugo and Jack for their wonderfully kind initiative in arranging this collection. I also want to say that my dear wife, Edith, has given me the same indispensable companionship through my work on this that she has given me all through our many years together, and the final thanks go to her.

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