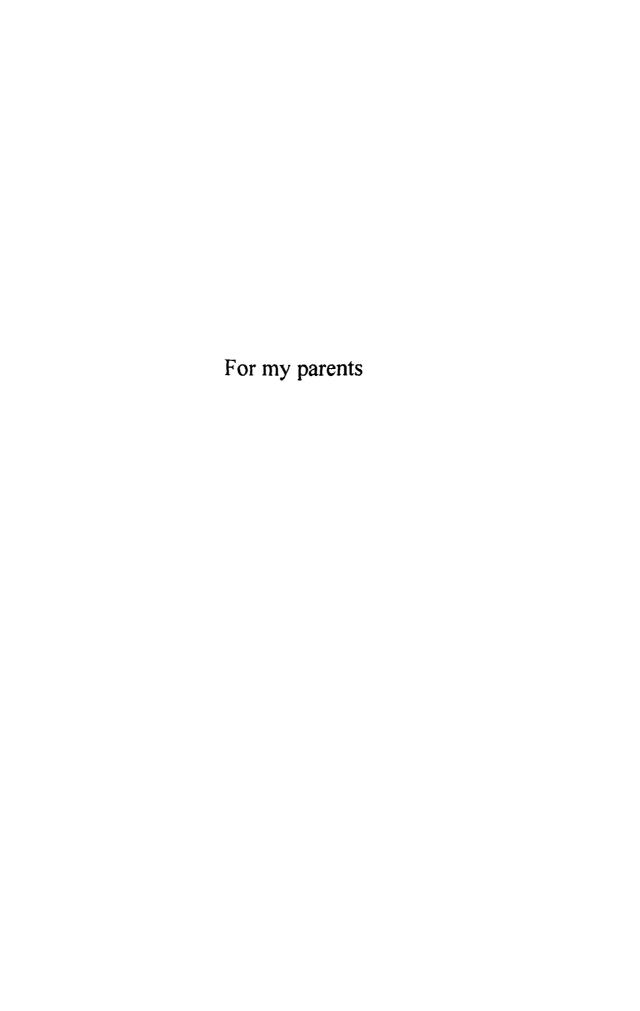# D.Z. Phillips and the Wittgensteinian Philosophy of Religion

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of the University of Liverpool
for the degree of Doctor in Philosophy

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For my parents

Contents

Acknowledgements

Abstract

Few thinkers familiar with D.Z. Phillips' philosophy of religion would deny that his approach is problematic. What is not often acknowledged, however, is that it has also been widely misrepresented. The aim of this thesis is to clarify his views where they have been most misunderstood, to identify areas of weakness, and to emphasise the strengths of his approach within the philosophy of religion.

Much of the thesis concerns the controversies surrounding his adoption of certain terms and phrases from Wittgenstein's philosophical method, and his application of these within his philosophy of religion. Expressions taken from Wittgenstein, such as 'description', 'language-games' and 'form of life', have all played an important role in Phillips' work. But neither Wittgenstein nor Phillips give precise definitions of these crucial expressions. One might suggest that it is for this reason that there has been an extraordinary amount of confusion surrounding Phillips' philosophy of religion. But it is clear that many thinkers have not paid close attention to what Phillips *actually* says, and fail to appreciate the depth and power of his philosophical achievement. It is important, however, to acknowledge that his philosophy is flawed. I suggest that while philosophers' criticisms are often based upon misunderstandings of Phillips and can divert attention from the importance of what he actually says, they also distract critics from serious problems that *can* be found within his work.

Phillips takes a confrontational stance in his writings, reflecting the importance the issues he writes about have for him, as a philosopher. But hidden among his well known, and (some might say) predictable attacks on contemporary thinkers, his familiar attempts to defend himself against critics, and his firmly held views on what philosophy should and should not do, lie compelling ideas about the role philosophy should take when examining religious beliefs, and an awareness of the dangers that exist for philosophers when they approach issues concerning religion. The difficulty facing those who are sympathetic to Phillips' approach is to elucidate this in terms that will do justice to the work he has done in his forty years as a philosopher.

Introduction

I

What follows is a defence of D.Z. Phillips' philosophy of religion. As we shall see, however, Phillips is not always an easy philosopher to defend. The thesis reflects this, being, for the most part, concerned with the problems, confusions and misunderstandings that have dominated the debate surrounding Phillips' work since *The Concept of Prayer* was published in 1965.[1] These confusions and misunderstandings *might* be attributed to the terms and phrases adopted from Wittgenstein[2] by Phillips and used within his philosophy of religion. That these expressions have, perhaps regrettably, come to be associated with the Wittgensteinian philosophy of religion, means that there is a considerable amount of work to be done, for they can *obscure* what is most important in the philosophical work of Phillips. But it is clear to me that his adoption of such terms and expressions is only part of the problem. The opening paragraph of *The Concept of Prayer* is as relevant as it has always been:

> To work in the field of philosophy of religion is like working on the Tower of Babel: one cannot take for granted that one's colleagues understand what one is saying. The position, if anything, is worse for the philosophers, since the builders at least were engaged on a common task, they were trying to do the same thing. No such agreement exists among philosophers of religion: the nature and purpose of their subject is itself a philosophical controversy.[3]

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[1] My aim here is not to give a detailed account of Phillips' work in the philosophy of religion, but rather to focus on some areas of confusion and interest, in the hope that the reader will, if not agree with Phillips, at least have a clearer understanding of what he was doing.

[2] There are numerous examples of expression taken from Wittgenstein. In this thesis I shall be focussing on the following: 'leaving everything as it is', 'description', 'depth grammar', 'language-games' and 'form of life'.

[3] Phillips, D. Z. *The Concept of Prayer*. London: Routledge and Kegan, 1965, p. 1.

This controversy is fundamental when we consider Phillips' work and the hostility that appears to surround it. His conception of the philosophy of religion *is*, as will be made clear, at odds with the mainstream of philosophy of religion. What Phillips says *of* religious belief, as a philosopher profoundly influenced by Wittgenstein, however, has attracted most hostility.

But of course, Wittgenstein was not a philosopher of religion. Little of his work intended for publication was *directly* concerned with this area of philosophy. Phillips' enthusiasm for his task of applying Wittgenstein's approach to religion might lead the naïve reader astray. On the first page of *The Concept of Prayer*, for example, he writes, concerning Wittgenstein's 'leaving everything as it is' that 'What he is saying is that if a philosopher wants to give an account of religion, he must pay attention to what religious believers do and say.'[4] This is misleading. Those familiar with the *Philosophical Investigations* will know that he never used the phrase in connection with religious issues. Indeed, the *Investigations*, as we shall see, were a crucial influence on Phillips' approach to the philosophy of religion, but had nothing to do with religious matters. Wittgenstein *spoke* of religion on many occasions. It occupied an important and deep place in his thinking. His thoughts, appearing in notes published after his death, recollections from friends and colleagues, and notes by students, confirm this.[5]

Phillips, in his large body of work, is most helpfully seen as an advocate of Wittgenstein's *method* as this might be applied in philosophy of religion. The following passage from a collection of essays on Wittgenstein and religion, offers a revealing

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[4] Ibid., p. 1.
[5] See Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Culture and Value.* Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980; Rush Rhees (ed.) *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, Oxford: O.U.P. 1984; Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief.* Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966.

insight into what became of Phillips' attempts to convince his contemporaries of the applicability of Wittgenstein's thought to the philosophy of religion:

> Wittgenstein's treatment of religion has been the subject of controversy with regard both to its nature and applications to problems in the philosophy of religion. There has been profound disagreement about how to handle his writings in this area. At present there is no consensus over the direction which should be taken.[6]

If Mark Addis is right, then we might say that Phillips, the most prolific and most often cited advocate of 'Wittgensteinian'[7] philosophy, in forty years as a philosopher, was unable to persuade his contemporaries that the manner in which he treated Wittgenstein's comments on religion *was* a convincing one. Phillips himself, in a later work, admitted that Wittgenstein has had little impact on philosophy of religion:

> Since the 1970s Wittgenstein's influence has waned, but the important point to note is that the revolution left mainstream philosophy of religion untouched. It has remained firmly entrenched in the empiricist tradition. [8]

A contrasting view of Wittgenstein's legacy is expressed by Brian Clack:

> Within fifty years of his death Wittgenstein's impact on both the philosophy of religion and theology has been enormous.[9]

Elsewhere Clack expresses his strong feelings towards the Wittgensteinian approach.

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[6] Addis, Mark. 'D.Z. Phillips' Fideism in Wittgenstein's Mirror' in *Wittgenstein and Philosophy of Religion*. Robert L. Arrington and Mark Addis (eds.) London: Routledge, 2001, p. 85.
[7] I use the term here to describe the philosophy that *follows* the work of Wittgenstein. Those philosophers who might be classified as Wittgensteinian philosophers, include Peter Winch, Rush Rhees and Norman Malcolm. I will be referring to these philosophers throughout the thesis. All are in broad agreement with each other on fundamental matters of the philosophy of religion.
[8] Phillips, D.Z. *Religion and Friendly Fire*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004, p.5.
[9] Clack, Brian. *An introduction to Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Religion*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999, p. 1.

The story of Wittgenstein's presence in contemporary philosophy of religion is a peculiar and in many respects a tragic one.[10]

The tragedy for Clack was that with the emergence of the Wittgensteinian philosophy of religion in the sixties came a way of talking, of adopting expressions and phrases from Wittgenstein which were then used in contexts that were simply not true to his work. Such approaches, according to Clack, are utterly misleading. Wittgenstein's view

> was habitually understood in terms of 'fideism': religion was a 'language-game', a 'form of life' neither requiring justification nor susceptible to criticism or explanation. Absence of such notions in Wittgenstein's own considerations of religion seemed to make little difference to these characterisations...readers find in Wittgenstein's writings what they expect to find there rather than what is actually there. And what is actually there is in fact infinitely more interesting, complex and challenging than the occasionally banal glosses which are now so familiar.[11]

Clack is only one of many philosophers who have been unhappy with Phillips' understanding of Wittgenstein and his attempts to apply Wittgenstein's thought to the philosophy of religion.[12] Others, such as William Alston, find Phillips' position just as unacceptable, but also emphasise the 'revisionist' nature of his approach, when it

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[10] Clack, Brian. *Wittgenstein and Philosophy of Religion*. London: Routledge, 2001, p. 12.

[11] Ibid., p. 12.

[12] We should remember that the expression 'Wittgensteinian fideism' (See Nielsen, Kai. 'Wittgensteinian Fideism'. *Philosophy*. Vol. 42 (1967), pp. 191-209.) was introduced by Kai Nielsen, an astute critic of the Wittgensteinian position. How this expression has been used when discussing what Phillips and other Wittgensteinians have said, is, according to Phillips, misleading. 'It is regrettable, at this stage, that it has become necessary, once again, to point out the simple fact that no philosopher I know of has held the theses attributed to Wittgensteinian Fideism.' (Phillips, D.Z. *Religion and the Hermeneutics of Contemplation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 25.). Phillips has repeatedly rejected accusations that such a characterisation applies to Wittgensteinians. 'Those influenced by Wittgenstein who have attempted to throw light on the nature of religious beliefs have been accused of wanting to shield religious belief against criticism. This alleged anti-intellectualism and conservatism has been given the name 'fideism', a term which, unfortunately, seems here to stay.' (Phillips, D.Z. *Belief, Change and Forms of Life*. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan Press, 1986, p. 4.)

comes to characterising *religion* in practice.[13] He makes a crucial point that few would disagree with:

> I suspect that the form(s) of religiosity he is recommending are live options only for a handful of sophisticated, 'liberated' individuals, and, so far from being the normal religious actuality, are not even possibilities for most of our fellows.[14]

The worry here is what 'God talk' has become in the hands of Phillips, 'simply a way of articulating a set of attitudes towards human life in the natural world...'[15] (Phillips famously holds that 'talk of God's existence or reality cannot be considered as talk about the existence of an object.'[16] And that God is not 'an existent among existents.'[17] He was profoundly affected by Rush Rhees here: "God exists' is not a statement of fact. You might say also that it is not in the indicative mood. It is a confession-or expression-of faith.'[18]) Phillips was aware of how absurd his views might sound:[19] 'What would be the point of worship, we are asked, if it is not the case that there is a God to worship?.[...].Any attempt to deny this view is regarded with incredulity.'[20] We should acknowledge that most Christians *do* see God or conceive of God

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[13] It is not merely the intellectual difficulties involved in the ways in which professional thinkers try to understand these very different areas of life, but the understanding by *believers* that have raised profound difficulties for Phillips, difficulties that some have claimed cannot be resolved.

[14] Tessin, Timothy and von der Ruhr, Mario (eds.) *Philosophy and the Grammar of religious belief.* London: Macmillan, 1995, p. 32.

[15] Ibid., p. 31.

[16] Phillips, D.Z. *Religion Without Explanation.* Basil Blackwell: Oxford, 1976, p. 174.

[17] *The Concept of Prayer*, p. 20.

[18] Rhees, Rush. *On Religion and Philosophy.* Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1997, p. 49.

[19] Fundamental is his denial that 'the point of religious practice is logically dependent on the truth of a proposition said to be independent of that practice.' (*Religion and Friendly Fire*, p. 59.), which might strike many believers as preposterous. Brian Davies suggests that Phillips' understanding is actually 'orthodox', in that it is not too far from the Biblical portrayal of God. He goes so far as to claim that 'if Dewi was theologically askew here then so, for example, was Thomas Aquinas.' Davies goes on to suggest that those who attack Phillips as revisionist in his views on God 'would not wish to suggest that Aquinas (whether they agree with his thinking or not) offered a radical reinterpretation of theism, one which amounts to a rejection of it, or one which was ignorant of what the Bible has to say.' (Davies, Brian. 'D.Z. Phillips on Belief in God'. *Philosophical Investigations*. Vol. 30, No. 3 (July 2007), p. 220.)

[20] Ibid., p. 59.

as 'something' out there (and we should acknowledge that Phillips talks too little about this).[21] There is the received understanding, held by believers, of what God is. It might not fit the crude notion of God described by John A. T. Robinson: 'Here God is the supreme being, the grand architect, who exists somewhere out beyond the world.'[22] But is the understanding that He does 'exist' in some sense, whether as a 'being' or as a force with something *like* a human personality about Him, a 'mind' of some sort, that we can relate to.

> We know, of course, that he does not exist in space. But we think of him nevertheless as defined and marked off from other beings *as if* he did. And this is what is decisive.[...]. It is difficult to criticize this way of thinking without appearing to threaten the entire fabric of Christianity-so interwoven is it in the warp and woof of our thinking.[23]

The fact is that whether people hold on to an anthropomorphic view of God, or whether they have a vague notion of the concept, it is such a part of people's understanding of Christianity that it is inevitable that deviating from this will draw accusations of absurdity. While the Wittgensteinian need not feel despondent at the suggestion that what he is talking about is not a *recognizable form* of Christianity, has little to do with the ordinary man's belief, one can sympathise with the view, suggested by Robinson, that, 'Without a person 'out there', the skies would be empty, the heavens

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[21] Those who accept that this as an accurate understanding of Christianity might agree with Kai Nielsen: 'Phillips, pure and simple, is an atheist or, like Braithwaite and Hare, an utter reductionist to the secular, which is to be an atheist in poor disguise with some additional emotive and expressive effects.' (Nielsen, Kai and Phillips, D.Z. *Wittgensteinian Fideism?* SCM Press: London, 2005, p. 199.) Here Nielsen is aligning his approach with Matthew Arnold's understanding of religion, almost word for word, in fact: 'All we have, Phillips denial to the contrary, notwithstanding, is morality touched with emotion along with a dash of obscurity.' ('And the true meaning of religion is not simply *morality*, but *morality touched by emotion*' (Arnold, Matthew. *Literature and Dogma*. Smith, Elder & Co: London, 1873, p. 21.)) You don't have to read much of Phillips' work to see his opposition to the approach taken by Arnold and those who were influenced by him (Most notable is his attack on Braithwaite in *Religion Without Explanation*)

[22] Robinson, John A.T. *Honest to God*. London: SCM Press, 1963, p. 30.

[23] Ibid., p. 30.

as brass, and the world without hope or compassion'.[24] Has Phillips gone too far here? According to Alston,

> Many, I would think virtually all, religious believers would think so. In restricting religious belief and discourse to the reflection of attitudes and sentiments concerning human life and the natural world, one has emptied theistic religion, at any rate, of its life blood. If we are not in vital contact with a supreme being Who has the kind of reality that makes Him the arbiter of the truth of our beliefs, as well as of the language-game-standards that play that role according to Phillips, then we are of all men the most miserable.[25]

It is clear, then, that there is controversy surrounding Phillips' philosophical approach *and* his understanding of what religious practice *is*. But it should be emphasised that to properly understand his philosophy of religion we must appreciate the nature of Wittgenstein's philosophical method.

II

In the first chapter I begin with an early criticism of Wittgenstein's approach to philosophy. This concerns the nature of his method, his understanding and controversial application of the term 'description',[26] and the associated expression 'leaves everything as it is'.[27] For Herbert Marcuse, such terminology indicated that Wittgenstein's philosophy is 'conservative', that it is 'committed with all its concepts to the given state of affairs' and 'distrusts the possibilities of a new experience.'[28] If one pays attention to what Wittgenstein actually wrote, and what he wanted to achieve, however, it soon becomes clear that his philosophy is *not* 'conservative'. Such criticisms, however, offer a good starting point for an investigation into the nature of Wittgen-

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[24] Ibid., p. 48.
[25] *Philosophy and the Grammar of Religious Belief*, p. 31.
[26] *Philosophical Investigations*, §109.
[27] Ibid., §124.
[28] Marcuse, Herbert. *One Dimensional Man*. London: Routledge, 1991, p. 173.

stein's method, its peculiarities, strengths and weaknesses. Within Wittgenstein's 'descriptive method', the notion of 'grammar' has a prominent role, but like description it is a term that can easily be misunderstood. What, for example, is the difference between Wittgenstein's understanding of grammar and our own, 'traditional' understanding? After having looked at such details of Wittgenstein's method we shall see how Phillips applied them within his philosophy of religion.

I will then move on to what is perhaps the most famous concept to have been adopted by Phillips from Wittgenstein in his investigations of religious practices. This is the notion of the 'language-game'. I will spend a chapter examining Wittgenstein's use of language-games, most notably his famous 'imaginary' example, of an exchange between two builders. There are many difficulties surrounding his use of the term. We can appreciate *why* Wittgenstein might see a likeness between language and games, but for many (including Wittgensteinians) there are severe limitations to the analogy, which have implications for the perception of Phillips' use of it in his philosophy. I do suggest, however, that they can be a useful tool for the philosopher in his aim for clarity.

I spend much of the third chapter defending Phillips. I devote a large part of it to an examination of language-games and their connection to 'form of life'. I have long been fascinated by the philosophical reaction to Phillips' adoption of these expressions. This is, in part, because it seems to me that his use of them has been misconstrued by almost every critic that I have read. This, of course, is partly because Wittgenstein (and Phillips) never gave a precise definition of these terms, but it is also because philosophers often do not pay enough attention to what Phillips actually says. I suggest that the interpretations of these expressions by critics not only stand in the way of a full appreciation of Phillips' achievements within the philosophy of religion,

but also of our appreciating certain, quite profound difficulties with what he has to say. It is important, therefore, to clear up misunderstandings that, despite Phillips' repeated attempts at clarification, have dogged his approach. Wittgenstein's language-games are for some critics close to esoteric games, and bear little relation to life. But I show that the importance of language-games lies in the fact that they exist in a form of life with other language-games, within 'the stream of life'. This is crucial for the understanding of religious language-games, for what would religion be without a profound connection to the life within which it exists? And yet, many have interpreted Phillips as meaning the opposite, and have accused him of saying that religious language-games are 'compartmentalised' or immune from external criticism. The critics' misreading of Phillips here makes it easier to defend him. In other areas of his approach, however, it is not so easy even to *agree* with him.

Thus, in the fourth chapter I examine two of the most worrying criticisms of his approach. In the opening section I return to the descriptive method. Phillips claims, following Wittgenstein, that philosophy 'leaves everything as it is'. But there seem to be examples within Wittgenstein's work of his not following description, of his interfering with, for example, what believers have to say of their faith. Phillips himself advocates a descriptive method in his philosophy of religion, and yet he appears to be *advocating* a particular understanding of what 'true' religion is. This has led critics to classify Phillips as a 'reformer' of religious language. Part of the problem here is undoubtedly the tendency for critics to misunderstand the grammar of Wittgensteinian description; that is its peculiar application by Wittgenstein *and* Phillips. But even *if* we accept that the Wittgensteinian understanding of the word 'description' is different from what we ordinarily understand it to mean, does Phillips remain faithful to it? This is a difficult question to answer with any clarity. But the most commonly cited

example of Wittgenstein and Phillips going 'beyond' description is in their characterisation of certain religious beliefs as 'superstition'. Here we come to the second criticism that can be made. This revolves around their understanding and application of the term. Wittgenstein's position, I suggest, is 'conventional'. He contends that superstition comes from fear and is something like pseudo-science (Phillips accepts this understanding). This has been a common view of superstition among philosophers, scientists and anthropologists. The most famous anthropologist who holds this position is James Frazer. I give a brief exposition of his understanding and Wittgenstein's criticism of it (and a *philosopher's* reaction to Wittgenstein's criticism). Of course, it is crucial that one makes it clear that Wittgenstein's understanding of *religion* is different from Frazer's. I then give an example, in the 'Prayer Gauge Debate', of the consequences of viewing religious practice (in this case prayer) as a form of mistaken science. This might seem to be an extreme example, but the views expressed are still widely held, and the kind of *thinking* involved here is present in many of Phillips' critics. I go on to describe *Phillips'* understanding of 'genuine' prayer and superstitious prayer, before examining whether superstitions can be characterised, as Phillips' characterises them, as 'mistakes'. It is here that Wittgensteinian philosophy is at its most absurd, *and* most profound. It is all too easy to dismiss Phillips' apparently heavy handed rejection of what many consider to be 'serious' prayers as superstition. In some cases (and this could be said of Wittgenstein), his judgements can appear to be harsh. But for him, the philosopher's role was to identify, through investigation, conceptual or grammatical confusion, *wherever* it might lie. What this comes down to where prayer is concerned is that if a believer prays to God in the hope that He will intervene, in no matter how serious a situation, then Phillips, *as a philosopher*, has to say that this is confused, and should not be accepted.

In the final chapter I examine several instances of this *bad philosophy*. I look at the implications of a short chapter written by Phillips on three films by Ingmar Bergman. The portrayal of religion and religious practices in these films is profoundly problematic for Phillips, who picks up on difficulties that other critics have ignored. In this chapter I want to show that it is the *approach* by Phillips that is important, that allows one to think about philosophical issues in a stimulating and interesting way. I also look at an example of artistic expression that he would have approved of, that avoided all the mistakes to be found in the Bergman films, that is the novel *The Diary of a Country Priest*, which I feel vindicates Phillips to a certain extent, *because* of its success as a portrayal of religion. I examine a paper written on the novel, which makes mistakes that would have been avoided if the critic had been able to appreciate the meaning (the depth grammar) of what was written. Instead, an *interpretation* of the portrayal of religion within the novel is offered by the critic, that emerges, in part, from a particular understanding of what religion is. The interpretation given is a shallow one, but is typical of approaches that Phillips criticises.

III

The following quote by Anthony Kenny draws attention to the importance of the Wittgensteinian approach:

> 'What is the use of philosophy if it is only useful against other philosophers?' is a question that was put with characteristic vigour by Professor Gilbert Ryle.[...].In an unpublished manuscript there is a very clear answer to the question...Wittgenstein says: 'Philosophy is a tool which is useful only against philosophers and against the philosopher in us.' It is only useful against philosophers, yes, but also against *the philosopher in us*...every one of us, every human being is trapped in philosophical errors. And there are a

number of indications that suggest Wittgenstein believed philosophy to be an unavoidable part of the human condition.[29]

While Phillips spent much time attacking other philosophers, I wish to emphasise that his philosophical approach is useful as a weapon 'against the philosopher in us'. Phillips criticised Bergman for his bad 'philosophy', as he criticised believers, and as Wittgenstein criticised Father O'Hara and James Frazer.

Following this we might appreciate why Phillips' (and Wittgenstein's) philosophy is sometimes characterised as being negative. As we shall see in the chapter that follows he doesn't *appear* to be doing much that is constructive. We can't deny that he spent much of his career attacking philosophers and other academics for what he saw as their errors and misunderstandings. But I hope to show that while there is *not* a constructive aspect to the philosophy, what can emerge from philosophical clarification *might* be constructive. There is, however, within Phillips' writings, a sense of alienation from other philosophers which, on occasions, is made explicit. In his *From Fantasy to Faith* we see a sense of despair that is absent from most of his work:

> As we listen to most contemporary debates about religion, to what passes for a defence of religion and to passes for an attack on it, we may experience a sense of utter hopelessness. We find ourselves saying that nothing can be done. Our surroundings appear more and more absurd to us.[30]

He goes on to acknowledge that the Wittgensteinian can find himself without philosophical friends.[31]

> But when I say 'we' listen, who does the 'we' refer to? What if the 'we' refers to very few people, and that the vast majority are prepared to accept the debate

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[29] Kenny, Anthony. *The Legacy of Wittgenstein*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1984, p. 48.

[30] Phillips, D.Z. *From Fantasy to Faith*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991, p. 115.

[31] I met D.Z. Phillips in the summer of 2005. When I mentioned that I was writing my thesis around his work in the philosophy of religion, he told me that I was 'committing academic suicide'.

on its own shabby terms? What, then?.[...].For the moment, at least, might it not be true that little can be done, that things are pretty hopeless? We must be ready to admit that this view could be the product of self-indulgence. We must be equally ready to admit that it could be true.[32]

I think that Phillips is not exaggerating here. It is clear that most philosophers do not accept what Phillips is saying. This thesis, then, has been written with critics of Phillips in mind; it is for those who feel they cannot accept Phillips' position. My aim is to at least clarify some of Phillips' views that they disagree with. And what interests me is *why* they disagree. Some of their disagreements might be based on confusion, or a misunderstanding of Phillips. I hope to show that this is so. Other problems might be genuine, and perhaps without any possibility of resolution. If we are to give a fair assessment of Phillips' work we should not be afraid to accept that this might be so.

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[32] *From Fantasy to Faith*, p. 124.

Chapter 1

Philosophy as Grammatical Investigation

Introduction

A philosopher unfamiliar with the (often rancorous) disputes surrounding the Wittgensteinian 'descriptive' method, who glances at a simple outline of what descriptive philosophy amounts to, might wonder why the approach has so many enemies. What descriptive philosophy of religion comes down to, according to Phillips, is that 'if the philosopher wants to give an account of religion, he must pay attention to what religious believers do and say.'[33] This *should be* uncontroversial.[34] M. Jamie Ferreira agrees:

> There is no question but that description must play an important role in philosophy of religion: The philosophy in philosophy of religion has to be one which looks at the discourse and practice concerning religious reality in order to appreciate its distinctive character, to obtain clarity about what religion says and shows of itself.[35]

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[33] *The Concept of Prayer*, p. 1.

[34] Phillips was always a perceptive philosopher. He highlights a peculiar difficulty with the descriptive approach: 'In a recent publication Paul Helm says that my emphasis on paying attention to the contexts in which religious concepts have their sense is one that no one is likely to disagree with. Of this it can be said that, as contemporary philosophy of religion shows, it is one thing to say this, and quite another to *do* it in one's philosophising.' (Phillips, D.Z. *Religion and the Hermeneutics of Contemplation.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 27.)

[35] Ferreira, M. Jamie. 'Normativity and Reference in a Wittgensteinian Philosophy of Religion'. *Faith and Philosophy.* Vol. 18, No. 4 (October 2001), p. 446.

Yet it is this very task of description[36] that Wittgenstein assigns to philosophy which has come under sustained and vocal attack. But we need to be clear about the 'Wittgensteinian method', to familiarize ourselves with aspects of this method, *and* with the problematic issues that emerge from these aspects, if we are to conduct a fair assessment of Phillips' work.

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[36] 'The task of philosophy is to *describe*. Describe *what*? Describe *concepts*. How does one describe a concept? By describing the use of the word, or of those words, that express the concept.' (Malcolm, Norman. *Wittgenstein: A Religious Point of View?* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995, p. 74.) This, I feel, is particularly difficult to *accept* as a proper application of the word 'description'.

In the first chapter of *The Concept of Prayer* Phillips suggests what he considers to be philosophy's role in looking at religion. He gives us this from Wittgenstein:

> Philosophy may in no way interfere with the actual use of language; it can in the end only describe it.
>> For it cannot give it any foundation either.
>> It leaves everything as it is.[37]

Before going on, we should acknowledge that this passage and its implications are extremely worrying for some thinkers, who feel that it is somehow anti-philosophy, anti-intellectual and conservative.[38] It is easy to assume that what is being said here is that philosophy *should* leave everything as it is, that *everything* is all right, that there is no reason to change anything; or that philosophy itself shouldn't *do* anything.[39] I want to show that these fears are unfounded and based on a misunderstanding of Wittgenstein. Typical, perhaps, of such error is Herbert Marcuse:

> The contemporary effort to reduce the scope and the truth of philosophy is tremendous, and the philosophers themselves proclaim the modesty and ineffi-cacy of philosophy. It leaves the established reality untouched; it abhors trans-gression.

Marcuse goes on:

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[37] Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1988, §124.

[38] And yet it is this passage that underpins Phillips' work. A few pages later he adapts it for his own purposes: 'Philosophy does not provide a foundation for prayer, it leaves everything as it is, and tries to give an account of it.' (*The Concept of Prayer*, p. 3.) And a little later he writes: 'Philosophy is neither for nor against religion: 'it leaves everything as it is.'' (Ibid., p. 10.)

[39] This charge of conservatism should be distinguished from that often aimed at Phillips' understanding of religious belief, of fideism: 'Those influenced by Wittgenstein who have attempted to throw light on the nature of religious beliefs have been accused of wanting to shield religious belief against criticism. This alleged anti-intellectualism and conservatism has been given the name 'fideism', a term which, unfortunately, seems here to stay.' (Phillips, D.Z. *Belief, Change and Forms of Life*. London: MacMillan, 1986, p. 4.) I will deal with this criticism later in the thesis.

'Wittgenstein's assurance that philosophy 'leaves everything as it is' shows 'academic sado-masochism, self-humiliation, and self-denunciation of the intellectual whose labor does not issue in scientific, technical or like achievements.[...].The self-styled poverty of philosophy, committed with all its concepts to the given state of affairs, distrusts the possibilities of a new experience.' [40]

The prohibitions Wittgenstein places on philosophy are to Marcuse extraordinarily severe: the advocating of non-interference, the rejection of theory, of the hypothetical,[41] of all explanation.[42] And of course, all that is 'hypothetical' and 'theoretical' must be replaced with 'description'; and Wittgenstein is explicit here: 'Philosophy simply puts everything before us, and neither explains nor deduces anything.'[43] And elsewhere: 'And we may not advance any kind of theory. There must not be anything hypothetical in our considerations. We must do away with all *explanation*, and description alone must take its place.'[44] And Marcuse's response *is* understandable: 'One might ask what remains of philosophy? What remains of thinking, intelligence,

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[40] Marcuse, Herbert. *One Dimensional Man*. London: Routledge, 1991, p. 173.

[41] 'There are no hypotheses in philosophy: if philosophy is a conceptual investigation, then there can be nothing hypothetical about it. It cannot be a *hypothesis* of mine that I am using a word to mean such-and-such. There cannot be any hypothetical rules for the use of expressions of a language. An anthropologist may hypothesize that the activity he is observing is conducted according to such-and-such rules, but the qualified participants in the activity are the authorities on the rules they follow (though not on their best codification).' (Hacker, P. M. S. *Wittgenstein's Place in Twentieth-century Analytic Philosophy*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1996, p. 114.)

[42] The understanding and use of the term 'explanation' that Wittgenstein *rejects* in philosophy, should be distinguished from his interests within and without philosophy, some of which might be considered as interests in explanations of sorts. Norman Malcolm suggests that 'It would be wrong to think that Wittgenstein was in general hostile to explanations.[...].Throughout his life he maintained a keen interest in machines and physical mechanisms – wanting to understand how they functioned and what caused their failure to function. It is not even true that in his philosophical work Wittgenstein was not interested in explanations. He was continually seeking explanations for *philosophical perplexity*.[...].Wittgenstein was singularly resourceful at *diagnosing* philosophical perplexities. He tried to explain their origins in terms of misleading pictures, half-articulated thoughts and assumptions.[...].In the whole history of philosophy there has never been so intensive a search for explanations of philosophical confusions.' (*Wittgenstein: A Religious Point of View?*, p. 4.)

[43] *Philosophical Investigations*, §126.

[44] Ibid., §109.

without anything hypothetical, without any explanation?'[45] This kind of response *was*, it seems, anticipated by Wittgenstein:

> Where does our investigation get its importance from, since it seems only to destroy everything interesting, that is, all that is great and important? (As it were all the buildings, leaving behind only bits of stone and rubble).[46]

And from his *Lectures on the Foundations of Mathematics*:

> 'I am only trying to recommend a certain sort of investigation. If there is an opinion involved, my only opinion is that this sort of investigation is immensely important and very much *against the grain* of some of you.'[47]

And Wittgenstein was an ambitious philosopher: 'My father was a businessman, and I am a businessman: I want my philosophy to be businesslike, to get something done, to get something settled.'[48] What this means, and the role it has within what is *perceived* to be the Wittgensteinian method, has been widely misunderstood. How, for example, can a philosophical method that proclaims itself to be purely descriptive get *anything* done?[49] Indeed, much of what follows concerns what, for better or worse, the approach taken by Phillips and the Wittgensteinians *actually* achieves. It will become clear that much controversy surrounds the understanding of the *way* pursued by Phillips and Wittgenstein. The following is from Michael Dummett:

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[45] *One Dimensional Man*, p. 178.

[46] *Philosophical Investigations*, §118.

[47] Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Wittgenstein's Lectures on the Foundations of Mathematics*. Hassocks, Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1976, p. 103.

[48] Rhees, Rush (ed.) *Recollections of .Wittgenstein*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984, p. 110.

[49] Marcuse's criticism can still be found in contemporary discourse. The following is a summary by Bela Szabados of Kai Nielsen's views: 'Wittgenstein's philosophical outlook is ethically and politically irresponsible, since its attitude of quietism leads us to a pernicious disengagement from the world and robs us of the critical tools to assess our culture and change it for the better. To put it bluntly, a philosophy that leaves everything as it is hinders the struggle for social justice, peace and human flourishing. It is an obstacle to human solidarity.' (Nielsen, Kai and Phillips, D.Z. *Wittgensteinian Fideism?* London: SCM, 2005, p. 4.)

We all stand, or should stand, in the shadow of Wittgenstein.[...].Some things in his philosophy, however, I cannot see any reason for accepting: one is the belief that philosophy, as such, must never criticize but only describe. This belief was fundamental in the sense that it determined the whole manner in which, in his later writings, he discussed philosophical problems; not sharing it, I could not respect his work as I do if I regarded his arguments and insights as depending on the truth of that belief.[50]

Like many of the commentators on, and critics of, Wittgenstein's approach, Marcuse and Dummett express clear misunderstandings. I think that it does take some patience to appreciate what is being said by Wittgenstein and that it is very easy to jump to conclusions that misinterpret his work (critics tend to react hastily). One can't deny the power of his writings to infuriate critics such as Marcuse. His approach, going against so much of what philosophers think[51] (and have thought) is important can appear to be, as P.M.S. Hacker puts it, 'a depressingly negative conception of the subject, depriving philosophy of its depth.'[52] However, while Wittgenstein *might* have been a conservative,[53] it would be incorrect to label his philosophy, as Marcuse would

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[50] Dummett, Michael. *The Logical Basis of Metaphysics*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1991, p. xi.

[51] In one of his later works, *Philosophy's Cool Place*, Phillips reflects on the contrast between the task *he* sees as the only task or duty of philosophy, and the roles it is commonly assumed to have: 'It was thought to be philosophy's distinctive task to test whether our beliefs had the required foundations, whether our modes of discourse reflected reality...if philosophy of ethics or religion are to get somewhere, they must show us whether there is a God or what constitutes the good life.[...].What I have tried to do in my work in the philosophy of religion is to show that a sensibility should be possible there which does justice to both belief and atheism. Both are rescued from what philosophy tries to make of them.' (Phillips, D. Z. *Philosophy's Cool Place*. New York: Cornell University Press, 1999, p. 163.)

[52] Hacker, P.M.S. *Wittgenstein's place in Twentieth Century Analytic Philosophy*, p. 112.

[53] Wittgenstein, it seems, was opposed to scientific or technological progress, or rather to the unquestioning importance placed on scientific progress. 'It isn't absurd, e.g., to believe that the age of science and technology is the beginning of the end for humanity; that the idea of great progress is a delusion, along with the idea that the truth will ultimately be known; that there is nothing good or desirable about scientific knowledge and that mankind, in seeking it, is falling into a trap. It is by no means obvious that this is not how things are.' (*Culture and Value*, p. 56.) Such a view, however, should not be attributed to Wittgenstein's conservatism. His whole way of thinking, his very philosophical approach, as we shall see, was opposed to the kind of thinking that goes along with the pursuit of scientific progress. And this was not because he feared change, but because, in his view, such thinking is narrow and inflexible, and ultimately, dangerous.

label it, a conservative philosophy,[54] although Wittgenstein's comments do not *seem* to support the notion that his philosophy is anything but destructive,[55] as Hacker makes clear:

> Philosophy, as he practised it, seems only to destroy all that is great and important (PI 118): that is, what we thought to be insights into the objective nature of things, into the essential structure of the human mind, into the conditions of the possibility of experience, or of language and thought. But, Wittgenstein replied, these were nothing but houses of cards; what philosophy does is dispel illusion. Not only can there be no theses or theories in philosophy, there can be no explanations either (PI 126). This seems to imply that all philosophy can do is to describe the use of words in order to cure Philosophical illnesses.[56]

While Wittgenstein does not aim for 'scientific, technical or like achievements', he does want to achieve much within philosophy.[57] But what he wants to achieve has nothing to do with achievements that are scientific or technological, for *his* method is radically different from 'scientific' method:[58] 'It was true to say that our considerations could not be scientific ones.[...].The problems are solved, not by giving new information, but by arranging what we have always known.'[59]

And one might wonder why, if the Wittgensteinian position *is* so conservative, does Wittgenstein himself attack the very thing that Marcuse *appears* to stand for

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[54] Few *would* accept Marcuse's criticism here: 'The writer's misunderstandings of Wittgenstein are gross and crass. They include all the usual ones, such as that Wittgenstein was an arch conservative in thought and language who would not allow Copernicus to say that the sun does not rise or Wordsworth to deny that the man is the father of the child.' (Bambrough, Renford. Review of 'One-Dimensional Man' by Herbert Marcuse. *Philosophy*. Vol. 69, No. 269 (July 1994), p. 381.)

[55] From Anthony Kenny: 'Wittgenstein certainly agrees that philosophy has a destructive role, though he also says that what it destroys is not worth preserving.' (*The Legacy of Wittgenstein*, p. 41.)

[56] *Wittgenstein's place in Twentieth-Century Analytic Philosophy*, p. 112.

[57] The problem is that certain questions are not *that* important to him: 'I may find scientific questions interesting, but they never really grip me. Only *conceptual* and *aesthetic* questions do that. At bottom I am indifferent to the solution of scientific problems; but not the other sort.' (Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Culture and Value*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980, p. 79.)

[58] 'Philosophers constantly see the method of science before their eyes, and are irresistibly tempted to ask and answer questions in the way science does. This tendency is the real source of metaphysics, and leads the philosopher into complete darkness.' (Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *The Blue and Brown Books*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1964, p. 18.)

[59] *Philosophical Investigations*, §109.

(that is the concern that philosophy should 'issue in' such things as 'scientific, technical or like achievements'[60]), and characterise *this* as conservative? In a conversation with Rush Rhees, for example, he is reported to have said the following: 'In fact, nothing is more *conservative* than science. Science lays down railway tracks. And for scientists it is important that their work should move along those tracks.'[61] (Here Wittgenstein is commenting on a book entitled *Marxism: Is it Science?* In which Max Eastman suggested that Marxism should be more scientific if were to be successful[62]) This at the very least shows something of what Wittgenstein was opposed to within philosophy, of what he wanted philosophers to avoid, to move away from.[63]

Now, Marcuse portrays Wittgenstein's philosophy as being opposed to any change in the way things are, as being a philosophy that is 'committed with all its concepts to the given state of affairs,' and which 'distrusts the possibilities of a new experience'.[64] But this pejorative characterisation of his approach would surely confound the Wittgensteinian.[65] This is because there is a serious *misinterpretation* here of something that *is* fact.

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[60] *One Dimensional Man*, p. 173.

[61] *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, p. 202.

[62] See *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, p. 202 and Monk, Ray. *Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*. Penguin: London, 1990, p. 486.

[63] 'Much of what we are doing is a question of changing the style of thinking.' (Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966, p. 28.)

[64] Wittgenstein was in favour of revolution: 'He shared with Communists a fierce dislike of the complacency of the British establishment, and he wanted to see some sort of revolution. But he wanted that revolution to be a rejection of the scientific *Weltanschauung* of our age, not an endorsement of it.' (*Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*, p. 486.)

[65] Wittgenstein, after all, placed a great deal of importance on philosophy: 'What is the use of studying philosophy if all that it does for you is enable you to talk with some plausibility about some abstruse questions of logic, etc., & if it does not improve your thinking about the important questions of everyday life, if it does not make you more conscientious than any...journalist in the use of the dangerous phrases such people use for their own gains.' (Malcolm, Norman, *Ludwig Wittgenstein, a Memoir*. London: Oxford University Press, 1958, p. 39.) Ray Monk tells us that this piece of correspondence relates to an argument he had had with Malcolm, after Malcolm had referred to the 'British national character'. Monk writes that this, for Wittgenstein, is 'an example of when, precisely because it is disagreeable, thinking clearly is most important.' (*Ludwig Wittgenstein: the Duty of Genius*, p. 474.)

We can see this in Marcuse's use of the word 'commitment'. Wittgenstein says that philosophy leaves everything as it is, but Marcuse *interprets* this as Wittgenstein's 'commitment' to the way things are. One doesn't need to read Wittgenstein too closely to see that he *was* dedicated to *changing* the way philosophers think. He sometimes wrote like a radical of sorts, about changing our ways of thinking, and about thinking about philosophy 'in a new way':

> The change is as decisive as, for example, that from the alchemical to the chemical way of thinking. The new way of thinking is what is so hard to establish. Once the new way of thinking has been established, the old problems vanish. [66]

And he famously talks of Philosophy as therapy:[67] 'The philosopher's treatment of a question is like the treatment of an illness.'[68] We can see, then, that Wittgenstein thought that his philosophical method had a vital role to play in intellectual life, and that it *was* extraordinarily active.[69] There is a crucial point which Marcuse appears to have missed completely, concerning Wittgenstein's claim that philosophy leaves everything as it is:

> This does not refer to the results of Wittgenstein's method, but to its character. Wittgenstein is saying that philosophy has everything it needs at hand for the clarity it aims for. It is already at the place it wants to understand.[70]

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[66] *Culture and Value*, p.48.

[67] 'Working in philosophy – like work in architecture in many respects – is really more a working on oneself. On one's own interpretation. On one's way of seeing things. (And what one expects of them)' (Ibid., p. 16.) What could be more difficult than working on oneself? And of course, what Phillips shows us is that one isn't simply working on oneself but on others, too.

[68] *Philosophical Investigations*, §255.

[69] Care has to be taken here. According to Hallet, Wittgenstein 'does not say, here, that the treatment of a philosophical question resembles the treatment of an illness, but that , as in the case of an illness, one treats a philosophical question, one does not answer it.' (Hallett, Garth. *A Companion to Wittgenstein's Philosophical 'Investigations'*. London: Cornell University Press, 1977, p. 336.)

[70] D.Z. Phillips, *Religion and Friendly Fire*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004, p. 12.

It would be preposterous to accept the notion that philosophy *actually* leaves everything as it is once its work is done:

> This dictum does not promote an intellectual quietism: Wittgenstein does not leave *philosophy* as it is, but tries to reveal it as 'plain nonsense' and 'houses of cards'. Nor does it deny that language changes. There are non-philosophical grounds for conceptual change (e.g., in science). The point is that it is not philosophy's business to bring about such reform by introducing an ideal language.[71]

Nevertheless we must appreciate how the language used by the Wittgensteinians can be so easily misinterpreted.[72] Phillips, however, does not tolerate those critics who, for example, get Wittgenstein wrong on this point; he dismisses such criticism bluntly:

> To think that 'leaving everything where it is' refers to the results of Wittgenstein's method would lead to manifestly absurd conclusions. Even those who make the assumption would admit, I take it, that Wittgenstein wanted to combat confusion. If the combat is successful in a given case, it is pretty obvious that something changes, namely confusion gives way to clarity. Does anyone seriously suppose that Wittgenstein is committed to saying that philosophical investigation leaves confusion where it is?[73]

So, Marcuse is convinced that Wittgenstein is committed 'to the given state of affairs', but it is clear that Wittgenstein considered philosophy to be important as a force for change. And the Wittgensteinians are not, *as philosophers* (in principle, at least), 'committed' to anything. For the Wittgensteinian, the kind of commitment Marcuse is talking about has no place in philosophy: 'In philosophy you are not

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[71] Glock, Hans-Johann. *A Wittgenstein Dictionary*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1996, p. 297.
[72] Statements given by defenders of Wittgenstein can themselves be misleading: 'The task of philosophy, for Wittgenstein, is to understand the world, not to change it. A dominant theme of Wittgenstein's later philosophy is that philosophy should be non-revisionary. Whatever its value, philosophy should leave our linguistic practices and, in particular, our theory of the world as they are.' (Lear, John. 'Leaving the World Alone'. *The Journal of Philosophy*. Vol. 79, No. 7 (July 1982), p. 382.) This comment *does* suggest 'quietism', a passivity that was absent from Wittgenstein's thought.
[73] *Religion and Friendly Fire*, p. 12.

committed to anything except discussion.'[74] Its *role* is not to give foundations for a belief in God, for example, or for the existence of electrons. It should not be there to argue for a particular political system, or to attack another.[75] But of course, Marcuse was a particular kind of thinker,[76] with a particular understanding of philosophy and the role that intellectuals should take in society. Importantly, no matter what the circumstances, the role of philosophy for the Wittgensteinian remains the same:

> The task of philosophy remains unchanged: as always, it has to endeavour to understand what lies before it. 'Leaving everything where it is', not adding anything to it, involves giving an account of cultural turbulence as much as it involves giving an account of cultural stability. Charges of anti-intellectualism and conservatism against Wittgenstein in this context are entirely misplaced.[77]

While I do think that it is of the utmost importance to dismiss any notion that the Wittgensteinian approach does *ultimately* leave everything alone, or abhors transgression, it is vital that we understand where its importance lies;[78] and to do this we need to clarify terms and issues connected to the approach. It is important to clarify what descriptive method actually does, how it works, what putting 'everything before us' (or 'understanding what lies before us') means for philosophy (and what it does, *philosophically*). It is important to emphasise that, although he might deny it, Wittgenstein's description *is* rather different from what *we* might think of as 'description':

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[74] Rhees, Rush. *On Religion and Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 28.

[75] In 1945, Rush Rhees mentioned to Wittgenstein that he thought he should join the Revolutionary Communist Party. According to Rhees, this was his response: 'When you are a member of the party you have to be prepared to act and speak as the party has decided. You will be trying to convince other people. In arguing and answering their questions you cannot turn back on the party line if you now see something shaky in it.[…].Whereas in doing philosophy you have got to be ready *constantly* to change the direction in which you are moving.' (*Recollections of Wittgenstein*, p. 208.)

[76] Marcuse himself provoked strong reactions: 'Marcuse began in Germany in the twenties by being something of a serious Hegel scholar. He ended up here writing trashy culture criticism with a heavy sex interest in *One Dimensional Man*.' (Bloom, Allan. *The Closing of the American Mind*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987, p. 226.)

[77] *Belief, Change and Forms of Life*, p. xi.

[78] From Marie McGinn: '…Wittgenstein does not see himself as out to refute doctrines, but as attempting to release us both from a particular style of thought and from the monsters of the intellect that it has allowed to control our philosophical imagination.' (McGinn, Marie. *Wittgenstein and the Philosophical Investigations*. London: Routledge, 2002, p. 22.)

'By 'description' Wittgenstein does not mean a passive account of what is going on, or anything like a sociological or historical survey of schools of thought.'[79] It is, however, one of the many words Wittgenstein uses that, for the unwary, has the *tendency* to mislead. For example, what would a philosopher not familiar with this particular area of Wittgenstein's thought, say if I suggested that philosophy's task *is* purely descriptive? Their initial reaction would surely be as Marcuse's; that this is a philosophy which, ultimately, has nothing to say, for the word 'description' *might* suggest an activity that is intellectually passive. When you are describing something you are not *doing* anything with it; at least that is the impression many seem to have. What philosophical work is being done in simply describing? Wittgenstein himself describes the different uses of description *within* the 'ordinary' conceptual framework of how one might understand the word:

> Think how many different kinds of things are called 'description': description of a body's position by means of its co-ordinates; description of a facial expression; description of a sensation of touch; of a mood.[80]

This is the characterisation of description that some philosophers attribute to Wittgenstein. It *is* tempting to see this approach as having similarities to the way, for example, an amateur water-colourist might see a landscape: as something to be reproduced in colour paints. He paints what is there, but the reproduction he gives us does not do anything for us, help us see the countryside in a different or evocative, stimulating way. Beyond reproduction, it has no further aim or goal (it might, of course, do a lot for us, but this is not the intention of the painter who simply aims for a decent reproduction). There can be nothing more. Wittgenstein's description *is* description, but the

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[79] *Religion and Friendly Fire*, p. 12.
[80] *Philosophical Investigations*, §254.

difference is in what this description can *do* for philosophical thought. And both Wittgenstein and Phillips think it can do something very important, as Norman Malcolm explains:

> 'The description of the use of a word is called by Wittgenstein describing the 'language-game' with that word. But he did not think that one is called upon to describe the use of a word in its *totality*. Only those features of the use of a word which give rise to philosophical perplexity need to be described. This 'putting before us' the use of a word includes *comparing* and *contrasting* its use with the use of other words. The words 'reason' and 'cause', for example, have a use that is similar in some respects, and different in other respects. The noting of these differences may take us by surprise – even though they are familiar words of daily language.
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> Describing the use of an expression is also called by Wittgenstein 'describing the *grammar*' of the expression.[...].But it would be a serious misunderstanding if one thought that describing language-games or describing grammar, only amounted to giving an account of sentence-construction or syntax.'[81]

Wittgenstein's description simply puts the 'use of words' before us, that is it *describes* in this sense, it describes what is said, for example, within a religious context; it *lets* the believer have his say; we can see the different uses words might have within and without the religious context. For example, 'gratitude' can have a different role within a religious context from that in a non-religious context. According to Phillips, to say 'I am grateful to God' is different from expressing gratitude to a kindly neighbour for looking after one's affairs while away: 'When we thank other people, the thanks are linked to the fact that these people did one thing rather than another.'[82] Can we say the same of gratitude to God? For Phillips there is a *profound* difference. But it is a difference that has been and is still missed by thinkers. This will be explored in a later chapter.

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[81] *Wittgenstein: A Religious Point of View?*, p. 75.
[82] *The Concept of Prayer*, p. 96.

But I do think that it is misleading to use the word 'description' and then go on to say that this is all there is to the Wittgensteinian method. It *is* laying out what is there before us (without *interfering* in what is said), but it is *also* looking carefully at the language used, the contexts of that use, seeing connections (words are not used in isolation), comparing and contrasting (the use of words in different contexts); this is not description as we would ordinarily understand it (think of how we might compare or think about the differences between religious gratitude and gratitude for a kind act by a stranger). This point is sometimes not made clear. It seems to me that some sympathetic thinkers are perhaps a little unwary or complacent here. For example, according to Fu-ning Ting, Wittgenstein's philosophy simply describes

> the use of language; in order to understand correctly the meaning or logic of our language, we have to describe the actual use of language. What is of importance in language is how we use it, not what it is. Hence, it is through the description of the use of words that the logic of language may be properly understood. Philosophical puzzlement can only be solved by describing the actual use of language.[83]

The above passage might leave a critic confused, for it is *not* being clear enough about the work done within the descriptive method; it is merely telling us that there is description involved.

The best way to clarify this notion of description, and to emphasise its distinctive meaning for the Wittgensteinian, is to turn to the kind of investigation that concerns him. For while the word 'description' might be associated with intellectual inactivity, with that which is almost inert, it *is* (in the case of Wittgensteinian philosophy) associated with a *method*. And the more perceptive commentators such as Glock, while

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[83] Ting, Fu-Ning. *Wittgenstein's Descriptive Method.* Hong Kong: Pontificae Universitatis Gregorianae, 1989, p. 25.

acknowledging the hostile criticism, can appreciate where the importance of this method can be found:

> This picture seems to impoverish philosophy, and is generally considered to be the weakest part of Wittgenstein's later work – slogans unsupported by argument and belied by his own 'theory construction', which can be isolated from the rest. Wittgenstein's methodological views must ultimately be judged by their results. But it is important to note that they are inextricably interwoven with the other parts of his work.[84]

The descriptive method is inextricably bound to Wittgenstein's understanding of the word 'grammar', so it is important to clarify this notion. But it is also important to understand that the descriptive method *consists* of (or, indeed, would not be a method without) a 'grammatical investigation' ('Our investigation is therefore a grammatical one.'[85])

> The proper aim of philosophy, according to Wittgenstein, is not to discover metaphysical truths, but to bring the practice of language into clearer view, thus revealing the *grammatical* character of so-called metaphysical truths.[86]

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[84] *A Wittgenstein Dictionary*, p. 295.
[85] *Philosophical Investigations*, §90.
[86] Aidun, Debra. 'Wittgenstein on Grammatical Propositions' in *Ludwig Wittgenstein, Critical Assessments*. Croom Helm: Beckenham, 1986, p. 142.

I wish now to clarify Wittgenstein's understanding of 'grammar' and 'grammatical investigation', and to show that Phillips' application of it to the philosophy of religion is in the *spirit* of Wittgenstein.[87] I also want to show how Phillips' work in the philosophy of religion actually illustrates Wittgenstein's method in an illuminating and accessible manner, and I hope to show how effective it can be in examining an area of life that is often understood by philosophers in a limited, constricted way. At the same time I want to show that there are temptations associated with the use of language advocated by Wittgenstein that can lead to confusion and misunderstanding. So, I will examine Wittgenstein's understanding of the word 'grammar', compare what are considered 'grammatical' statements with those that are 'empirical', examine the notions of 'depth' and 'surface' grammar, and compare the role of theology and philosophy, for both, according to Wittgenstein, are concerned with grammar.

Much of Phillips' work in philosophy is devoted to attacking thinkers (most of whom are contemporary philosophers) and believers who, he feels, are making *philosophical* errors. And the most common reason for his criticism concerns the use or understanding of 'grammar'. For Wittgenstein and Phillips, the investigations carried out within philosophy are grammatical in nature; philosophy simply 'describes' language *use*:

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[87] We should be aware, however, that Wittgenstein rarely relates grammar to religion. But in the *Investigations*, for example, there is the following: 'Grammar tells what kind of object anything is. (Theology as grammar.)' (*Philosophical Investigations*, §373.) And from *Zettel*: 'How words are understood is not told by words alone. (Theology.)' (Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Zettel*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967, §144.) And, '"You can't here God speak to someone else, you can hear him only if you are being addressed".-That is a grammatical remark.' (Ibid., §717.)

Grammar does not tell us how language must be constructed in order to fulfil its purpose, in order to have such-and-such an effect on human beings. It only describes and in no way explains the use of signs.[88]

Wittgenstein's understanding of grammar is not *technically* difficult, but like all of the problematic concepts that we will be examining, Wittgenstein is never precise in defining what it is he is talking about.[89] Because of this, confusion can surround talk of what grammar amounts to and where its importance lies. It is also difficult to grasp and *accept* his understanding of 'philosophy' and philosophical investigation as 'purely' grammatical. One can't deny that this is a radical break from the way many philosophers think about the role of philosophy. There are problems that can emerge from this. As Baker and Hacker write,

Wittgenstein's conception of grammar has not been well understood and has met with a hostile reception. Clarifying it is an important exegetical task. Defending it is arguably a pressing philosophical need.[90]

Clarifying Wittgenstein's concept of grammar is vital, partly because his thinking runs against many approaches to philosophy, which means that it is exposed to the criticism of those who hold a *different* conception of the discipline. And it is important to appreciate that some of the 'difficulties' of Wittgenstein's approach have been *inherited* by Phillips in his application of it to the philosophy of religion. Much criticism of *his* work focuses on these difficulties, on the 'Wittgensteinian' nature of his approach. In fact, as we have seen, Phillips' work has met with what appears to be

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[88] *Philosophical Investigations*, §496.

[89] The Wittgenstein passage cited above apparently describing the role of grammar can appear at odds with what he writes elsewhere. Again: 'Grammar does not tell us how language must be constructed in order to fulfil its purpose, in order to have such-and-such an effect on human beings. It only describes and in no way explains the use of signs.' The impression that this gives might seem rather different from that gleaned from the following: 'Grammar tells what kind of object anything is. (Theology as grammar.)' (Ibid., §373.)

[90] Baker, G.P. & Hacker, P.M.S. *Wittgenstein: Rules, Grammar and Necessity*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982, p. 51.

almost universal derision. For this reason, we must, at the very least, offer clarification in areas that have been most misunderstood.

It is, in part, Wittgenstein's use of the concept of 'grammar' and the *philosophical* importance he places on it that makes Wittgenstein's method distinctive. And it is what this means for philosophy (and the philosophy of religion), and philosophical investigation, that many philosophers have struggled to accept. It is important, therefore, to attempt a lucid exposition of Wittgenstein's understanding of grammar. For Wittgenstein, then, philosophy is 'grammatical' investigation. If we don't understand what this means, then we will not be able to arrive at an understanding of what drove Phillips's philosophical approach to religion.

Wittgenstein uses the terms 'grammar' and 'grammatical' in various ways throughout his writings. The notion of 'grammar' concerns the use of words, or the rules for the use of words: '...you should not let yourself be misled by the grammar of the words "know" and "mean".'[91] Or, 'We said that it was a way of examining the grammar (the use) of the word "to know", to ask ourselves what, in the particular case we are examining, we should call "getting to know".'[92] And, of course, expressions: 'The grammar of the expression "I was then going to say..." is related to that of the expression "I could then have gone on." In the one case I remember an intention, in the other I remember having understood.'[93]

So, when one talks of the grammar of the word 'God' one is talking about the way that the word is used and the rules for its employment: '...So does it depend wholly on our grammar what will be called (logically) possible and what not,-i.e. what that

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[91] *Philosophical Investigations*, §187.
[92] *The Blue and Brown Books*, p. 23.
[93] *Philosophical Investigations*, §660.

grammar permits?'[94] And: "Grammar tells what kind of object anything is. (Theology as grammar.)'[95] This last pregnant comment encourages us to elaborate:

> In effect, by remarking that theology is grammar, he is reminding us that it is only by listening to what we say about God (what has been said for many generations), to how what is said about God ties in with what we say and do in innumerable other connections, that we have any chance of understanding what we mean when we speak of God.[96]

Wittgenstein himself, very briefly, but explicitly, refers to this: 'The way you use the word "God" does not show *whom* you mean – but, rather, what you mean.'[97] It follows from all of the above that a grammatical investigation is an investigation into the use of words, into their meaning, their sense. In the *Philosophical Investigations* he gives us the following explanation, which highlights the most significant point concerning the motivation behind grammatical investigation:

> Our investigation is therefore a grammatical one. Such an investigation sheds light on our problem by clearing misunderstandings away. Misunderstandings concerning the use of words, caused, among other things, by certain analogies between the forms of expression in different regions of language.-Some of them can be removed by substituting one form of expression for another; this may be called an "analysis" of our forms of expression, for the process is sometimes like one of taking a thing apart.[98]

The importance of this quotation can be found in the purpose he gives his grammatical investigations. These *do not* leave everything as it is; they are not being used to 'merely' clarify, but have the function of removing misunderstandings. I shall be examining the nature of such misunderstandings a little later in the chapter. Wittgenstein

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[94] Ibid., §520.
[95] Ibid., §373.
[96] Kerr, Fergus. *Theology after Wittgenstein*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986, p. 148.
[97] *Culture and Value*, p. 50.
[98] *Philosophical Investigations*, §43.

emphasises that what is being talked about here is not something abstract, but that we understand language through discussing its use:

> We are talking about the spatial and temporal phenomenon of language, not about some non-spatial, non temporal phantasm. But we talk about it as we do about the pieces in chess when we are stating the rules of the game, not describing their physical properties.
> The question "What is a word really?" is analogous to "What is a piece in chess?"[99]

What has been said so far shows something quite crucial about Wittgenstein's understanding of grammar, that throws light on Phillips' approach to the philosophy of religion. Grammar and grammatical investigation (philosophy), for Wittgenstein, are concerned with a broad understanding of 'language use', with how language is *used in our lives*.

'Grammar' as used by Wittgenstein is not solely concerned with what we might ordinarily understand as the 'subject matter' of traditional grammar. Both forms of grammar *are* concerned with words: 'school' grammar and Wittgenstein's 'philosophical' grammar concern themselves with the use of words. But it is tempting to exaggerate the difference between Wittgenstein's understanding of grammar and our 'linguistic' one. Russell, for example, in a letter to Moore, famously characterised Wittgenstein's concept of grammar as 'peculiar'.[100] Clearly there *is* a 'difference' between the concept of grammar as Wittgenstein uses it and the grammar of the classroom, but what kind of difference? Wittgenstein did not actually say that his understanding of grammar was *different* from what we normally understand grammar to be, and he did not say that he was dealing with a peculiar form of grammar. What *we* can

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[99] Ibid., §108.
[100] 'He uses the words 'space' and 'grammar' in peculiar senses, which are more or less connected with each other. He holds that if it is significant to say 'This is red', it cannot be significant to say 'This is Loud'. There is one 'space' of colours and another 'space' of sounds.' (Russell, Bertrand. *Autobiography*. London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1978, p. 437.)

say, in agreement with Mark Addis, is that there are not *two* different sorts of grammar being used here, but

> rather that there are two sorts of focus upon grammatical rules which are shaped by divergent goals. The philosopher and the linguist handle grammatical issues differently because of their differing objectives.[101]

Marie McGinn in her lucid book, *Wittgenstein and the Philosophical Investigations*, clarifies this further:

> Wittgenstein's use of the concept of 'grammar'…is different from the traditional one. His use of the concept of 'grammar' relates, not to language considered as a system of signs, but to our *use* of words, to the structure of our *practice of using* language.[102]

Philosophy is not simply concerned with 'linguistics', with language use, for *the sake* of 'grammatical correctness' or clarity. It is not there to correct the student's language in his essays. The expert on grammar, only concerned with grammar, is unlikely to have an interest in philosophy. And Wittgenstein would not be interested, philosophically, in a sentence that has problems that would worry an English teacher. 'They was different to the other men', as a sentence, will be of no philosophical concern for the Wittgensteinian. With this kind of error we understand what the person wants say. A *philosophically* problematic confusion of grammar, on the other hand, concerns the *sense* of what is being said and needs to be clarified.[103] Grammatical difficulties in a student's work, would, I imagine, be clear enough for the teacher and he would fix it with a little care; it has nothing to do with philosophical problems. But this is *all*

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[101] *Wittgenstein: A Guide for the Perplexed*, p. 79.
[102] *Wittgenstein and the Philosophical Investigations*, p. 14.
[103] For example, a believer might say 'God is real to me' in response to an atheist's argument, meaning 'you might not believe in God as a being who really does exist, but I do'. This for the Wittgensteinian, at least, is philosophically problematic. The philosophical difficulties concern the meaning of the phrase 'God is real to me'.

Wittgenstein's grammatical investigations are concerned with. It is the *apparent* difficulties within philosophy that are the subject of Wittgenstein's work here, that are the motivation for his grammatical investigations (the *only* motivation). So there is no essential *difference* in the understanding of grammar for the teacher and the philosopher as far as it goes, but the philosophical application of grammar has an aim, and that is philosophical clarification. When we use words we are following rules of grammar. Again, philosophy's motivation for focussing on the rules of grammar, the rules for the use of words, expressions and so on, is that by doing this one can clarify that which is seen as being philosophically puzzling. We need to bear this in mind when we come to examine Phillips' philosophy of religion, and his approach to philosophical problems that are to be found there. But philosophy or grammatical investigation for Wittgenstein and Phillips is not concerned with 'grammar' as geology is concerned with the structure of the earth, or biology with living things. It is solely concerned with philosophical questions or 'problems'.

I have so far distinguished between two applications of the concept of grammar and we have seen that the difference lies in the fact that the philosophical significance of grammar can be found in the *use* of words in culture, rather than in the narrower sense of the effective combination of words employed in the construction of a sentence. This can be demonstrated by looking at an aspect of grammar that might at first appear to be rather perplexing, and too *abstract* to be of any relevance to the philosophy of religion, but which is useful when we come to identify philosophical misunderstandings. This is the notion of a 'grammatical' proposition. The following quotation is from Garth Hallett:

> And he…said, more than once, that many of the difficulties are due to the fact that there is a great temptation to confuse what are merely experiential propositions, which might, therefore, not have been true, with propositions which are necessarily true or are, as he once said, 'tautological or grammatical statements'. He gave, as an instance of a proposition of the latter sort, 'I can't feel your toothache,' saying that 'If you feel it, it isn't mine' is a matter of grammar.[104]

One of the features of grammatical propositions that can be drawn from the passage above, is that the opposite cannot be imagined. 'It would not make sense to say: 'I can feel your toothache'. And there is good reason why this is so.

> "I can't imagine the opposite" doesn't mean: my powers of imagination are unequal to the task. These words are a defence against something whose form makes it look like an empirical proposition, but which is really a grammatical one.[105]

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[104] *A Companion to Wittgenstein's "Philosophical Investigations"*, p. 313.
[105] *Philosophical Investigations*, §251.

Important for Wittgenstein is the *contrast* between grammatical propositions and those that are considered 'empirical'. He goes on:

> "Every rod has a length." That means something like: we call something (or *this*) "the length of a rod"-but nothing "the length of a sphere" Now can I imagine 'every rod having a length'? Well, I simply imagine a rod. Only this picture, in connexion with this proposition, has quite a different role from one used in connexion with the proposition "This table has the same length as the one over there". For here I understand what it means to have a picture of the opposite (nor need it be a mental picture). But the picture attaching to the grammatical proposition could only shew, say, what is called "the length of a rod". And what should the opposite picture be?[106]

We can say that unambiguously 'empirical' or 'experiential' propositions are the concern of science.

> Scientific theories and hypotheses try to provide causal explanations of empirical phenomena. Philosophical problems, by contrast, cannot be solved by experience or causal explanation, since they are conceptual, not factual.[107]

Philosophical problems are 'not empirical problems',[108] and it seems to follow that *philosophical* statements are not empirical statements, although they might appear to be so because they have the same form. This is brought out well by W.E. Kennick.

> The key to Wittgenstein's view – or at least one of Wittgenstein's views – of 'the subject which used to be called "philosophy"' as well as his own investigations, lies, as I see it, in the distinction he draws between empirical or experiential propositions, which make up natural history and natural science, and conceptual or what he most often calls 'grammatical' propositions – in an extended, or even metaphorical, sense of the word. For he denies that philosophy is science or natural history – philosophical statements are not empirical statements, and he holds that philosophical statements are in one way or another grammatical.[109]

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[106] Ibid., §251.
[107] *A Wittgenstein Dictionary*, p. 344.
[108] *Philosophical Investigations*, §109.
[109] Kennick, W.E. 'Philosophy as Grammar and the Reality of Universals' in *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Philosophy and Language*. London: Allen and Unwin, 1972, p. 141.

Initially, this appears to be clear enough. An empirical 'proposition', the concern of science, of scientific investigation, is a statement about something in the world, is not 'concerned' (as Wittgenstein's grammar is thought to be concerned) with the use of words; and investigation in science takes the form of observation or experiment, such that a proposition can be confirmed or disconfirmed. For Debra Aidun, 'When we try and put into words what shows itself in the grammar of language, grammatical propositions result. These *only* show and do not say anything at all.'[110] This is important, so we must understand what it means to 'say something' in this context.

> An empirical proposition *says* something is the case; it asserts the existence of some fact, and is true if that fact exists. In addition, empirical propositions also *show* but do not say that words may be combined in certain ways to yield sensible expressions. Logical tautologies represent a limiting case. They do not make assertions about the world; they *say* nothing.[111]

So, an empirical proposition *does* say something, what is says concerns 'facts': 'The Empire State building is the tallest building in the world.' If this is the case, then the empirical proposition is true. A grammatical proposition might say something of the use of a word, a rule and so on, but a grammatical investigation is not an investigation into anything 'in the world', that is, within the conceptual framework of the physical world. For Aidun,

> The grammar of language *shows* itself in the practice or use of language. Any well-formed English sentence, even one which makes a false claim, *shows* something about the grammar of English. When we try to put into words what shows itself in the grammar of language, grammatical propositions result. These *only* show and do not say anything at all. They exemplify certain grammatical connections and point to these rather then [sic] to any empirical state of affairs. Nonsense results when we regard these propositions as *saying* something, as expressions of metaphysical truth, for example.[112]

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[110] *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Critical Assessments*, p. 148.
[111] *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Philosophy and language*, p. 141.
[112] *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Critical Assessments*, p. 148.

This view[113] contrasts starkly with propositions that make up scientific investigation, for example, with how we might go about a scientific investigation. There are particular skills involved, and methods of investigation. There are experiments, and such experiments, investigations, have a clear and unambiguous aim:[114] to get results, in the sense of finding out something 'factual', to assert something, to say something *about* a phenomenon. (The contrast here is of crucial importance, for it is in this area that many philosophers, according to Phillips at least, have run into trouble) Philosophy, for Phillips, does not 'get' anywhere in this sense (it does not aim to get somewhere, in the sense that science *has* to get somewhere),[115] which is why it has been emphasised that the character of philosophy is grammatical in nature.[116] Philosophical statements are 'grammatical' statements. But if we say that the subject of philosophy is grammar, we are not denying that it is concerned with philosophical questions. These can, superficially (that is in their form) at least, appear to be concerned with something else.

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[113] What Aidun says might be considered somewhat misleading. For her, 'grammar of language *shows* itself in the practice or use of language.' As we shall see when we come to depth grammar, it is surely the sense of what is said that is shown in the grammar. Aidun also writes of grammatical statements that 'Nonsense results when we regard these propositions as *saying* something...' Is this always so? Isn't it the role that is important, the use that they have? A particular proposition might have a grammatical function in a particular context, while in another it might have an empirical use.

[114] 'It might be said that science shows us certain techniques of investigation, and it shows us the results of particular investigations.' (Rhees, Rush. *Without Answers*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969, p. 32.)

[115] This is emphasised by Phillips: '...philosophy, more than any subject, in its metaphysical systems was really concerned with 'going somewhere'. Indeed, it was thought to be philosophy's business to decide whether *any* of beliefs were 'going somewhere', whether they were rational or irrational. It was thought to be philosophy's distinctive task to test whether our beliefs had the required foundations, whether our modes of discourse reflected reality. This was the Enlightenment ideal: all must be brought to the bar of reason to be judged there. So if philosophy of religion or ethics are to get somewhere, they must show us whether there is a God or what constitutes the good life.' (*Philosophy's Cool Place*, p. 159.)

[116] Phillips considers his approach 'contemplative', 'Much of contemporary philosophy of religion wants to get somewhere-to show whether there is a God. The philosophical reflection that does not go there contents itself with showing what it means to believe in God or to deny His existence. This is what I mean by a contemplative conception of philosophy...' (Ibid., p. 163.) For Phillips, it is only through adopting the contemplative method that we can appreciate the depth grammar of the statement 'God exists.' And this is the outcome of a grammatical investigation.

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These questions typically concern what is necessary or impossible, what is possible even though not actual. (hence what is conceivable or imaginable). They often have the form of questions about the nature or essence of this or that, or about the essential relationships between kinds of things. Hence many philosophical questions have the appearance of questions in physics or natural science. This is misleading. When the philosopher asks such questions as 'What is colour?', 'What is perception?', 'What is dreaming?' He is not concerned with theories about light waves, nerve receptors, or rapid eye movements. He is concerned with the *concepts* of colour, perception or dreaming, and to investigate these concepts (which are presupposed by the scientists' empirical investigations) is to investigate the use of these and cognate expressions in language.[117]

At the heart of confusions here, of course, is not seeing statements for what they are. Kennick brings this out by making a distinction between two different kinds of grammatical proposition:

A proposition is explicitly grammatical if it mentions a word (or words) and says something about its (their) use; it is implicitly grammatical if it uses, but does not mention, a word (or words) but still expresses a rule, convention, or decision about verbal usage and imparts no information about the world.[118]

I think he does well to distinguish between the implicitly grammatical and explicitly grammatical. If something is 'explicitly grammatical', then it often conforms to the traditional notion of what grammar is. Wittgenstein gives an example: 'In "I have a pain", "I" Is not a demonstrative pronoun'.[119] So all is clear here, there is no ambiguity. What is of interest are *implicitly* grammatical propositions. It is these that can cause difficulties and confusions for philosophers. For while explicitly grammatical propositions seem to be clear enough, are perspicuous, those that are implicitly so can appear to be something quite different. But I don't think we need say any more about such a distinction. Wittgenstein himself doesn't make it, and I have not found another philosopher who does.

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[117] *Wittgenstein: Rules, Grammar and Necessity*, p. 52.
[118] *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Philosophy and Language*, p. 142.
[119] *The Blue and Brown Books*, p. 68.

Hans-Johann Glock makes a good point:

> The contrast between grammatical and empirical propositions is one between
> the *rules of* our language-games, and *moves in* our language-games made in
> accordance with these rules.[120]

An empirical proposition such as, 'The Empire State Building is the tallest building in

the world.' is a move in the language-game of giving information, and to confirm its

truth or falsity we need do nothing other than confirm certain facts about the building

in relation to all others.[121] For Aidun, grammatical propositions

> have the form of empirical propositions and appear to make informative asser-
> tions about various states of affairs, just as empirical propositions do .[...].To
> regard grammatical propositions, because of these superficial similarities to
> empirical propositions, as expressions making substantive claims which are,
> moreover, necessarily true, is to succumb to grammatical illusion.[122]

To 'succumb to grammatical illusion' here[123] is to be bewitched by language, it is to

be distracted by 'surface grammar' while ignoring or missing the 'depth grammar' of

a statement. These concepts, of 'surface' and 'depth' used in connection with gram-

mar, and vital for Phillips, are those that are most likely to mislead if not properly un-

derstood. They have greater importance for Phillips than talk of grammatical proposi-

tions (and I think that they make talk of implicitly or explicitly grammatical proposi-

tions redundant), and yet Wittgenstein tells us even less about them. This is what he

writes about surface grammar:

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[120] *A Wittgenstein Dictionary*, p 151.
[121] This is an important point, but it is also important to emphasise that the same proposition can have
different roles depending on context. In one context it might well be a move in the language-game of
giving information, in another it might say something about the use of a word.
[122] *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Critical Assessments*, p. 143.
[123] Again, caution should be exercised here. Aidun does not emphasise that while an empirical proposi-
tion might have the same form but a different use to a grammatical proposition, the same proposition
might have very different uses, depending on the contexts of its employment.

What immediately impresses itself upon us about the use of a word is the way it is used in the construction of the sentence, the part of its use-one might say-that can be taken in by the ear.[124]

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[124] *Philosophical Investigations*, §664.

What we ordinarily understand by the term 'grammar' appears to fall within Wittgenstein's understanding of surface grammar, as it exclusively concerns the way words are used in the construction of sentences. Wittgenstein does not go on to explain what depth grammar is, but writes:

> And now compare the depth grammar, say of the word 'to mean', with what the surface grammar would lead us to suspect. No wonder we find it difficult to know our way about.[125]

John F. Hunter articulates what many might feel about this passage:

> We are asked to compare the depth grammar of 'to mean' with what its surface grammar would lead us to suspect, without being given any examples of surface grammar leading us to suspect anything, or any examples of the kind of thing this is to be compared with. No wonder indeed we find it difficult to know our way about.[126]

Surface grammar is what immediately impresses and is that which is taken in by the ear. It (in some instances) 'leads us' away from seeing what is the case (that is the way words are actually used). What is particularly interesting for me is how Wittgenstein describes surface grammar, and what *this* says about its character and its role in language. His use of the phrase is not pejorative. He is not saying that surface grammar is always misleading, or 'wrong'. There might be nothing wrong at all with the surface grammar. He is simply pointing out the features of language that are most apparent, 'What immediately impresses itself upon us about the use of a word'. And that

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[125] Ibid., §664.
[126] Hunter, John F. 'Depth Grammar' in *The Philosophy of Wittgenstein: Method and Essence*. New York: Garland Publishing, 1986, p. 152.

might, in *some* circumstances, lead us astray to (and this has quite profound implications for the philosophy of religion) *philosophically* unacceptable understandings. The *depth grammar*, however, should show us whether the surface grammar is something we can 'get along with' (as philosophers).

Depth grammar is revealed by grammatical investigation and is what is *philosophically* interesting. This is so, but we should be aware of the importance of surface grammar. The philosopher who is led astray by the surface grammar is the very person for whom Wittgenstein's philosophical method is necessary. Wittgenstein's philosophical investigation 'sheds light on our problem by clearing misunderstandings away. Misunderstandings concerning the use of words...'[127] By paying attention to the depth grammar (that is by elucidating the sense of what is being said), we should be able to see if our initial understanding of a statement was confused. Surface grammar, then, is not always misleading, but carries with it the danger that we will be misled by what is immediately apparent in a statement (how words or a combination of words appear). And so a grammatical statement might be *seen* as an empirical statement (as having the role of an empirical statement). Philosophers, by focussing on surface grammar of certain statements, might be said to have failed to gain or achieve a clear overview of the use of words in a language, a culture; the very contexts of the use of a word. And a reflective philosophical approach will show that this is so. In the *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein writes: 'My aim is: to teach you to pass from a piece of disguised nonsense to something that is patent nonsense.'[128]

So, there is a danger of philosophy running into confusion when it focuses on the surface grammar, that is on what 'immediately impresses' about the use of a word.[129]

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[127] *Philosophical Investigations*, §90.
[128] Ibid., §464.
[129] From Hunter: 'We say 'I said it and I meant it'. Here there is a striking surface similarity between the use of the words 'say' and 'mean'. Since saying is something we do, this similarity might lead us to

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Now, this is all very well, but there are difficulties that can be associated with the application of such expressions to the philosophy of religion. One concern *I* have is that Wittgenstein's use of the terms 'depth' and 'surface' might be understood as being pejorative. This might make it particularly difficult to use 'depth grammar' as Wittgenstein used it, when one is working within the philosophy of religion. Depth grammar is not to be seen as being 'deeper' in the sense that one can have a deeper appreciation of a piece of music, for example, or poetry, or a deeper *piece* of music or poetry. It is not deep in the sense that one might penetrate deeper into space. And it is different from Rhees' understanding of 'depth or shallowness in a way of living.'[130] And yet the differences between it and these examples can be subtle.[131] When we come to look at Phillips' application of the term we will see just how easy it is to miss such differences. For Hunter,

> While depth grammar, being also a matter of the way a word is used in the construction of sentences, might appear to be insufficiently distinct from surface grammar, its distinctness lies in the fact that it is not the grammar of the sentence with which we begin.[...].We must probe for depth-grammatical propositions, and it can require some know-how to list a sampling of the sentences that ought to be used, given any striking feature of the surface grammar.[132]

For Hunter, depth grammar 'being also a matter of the way a word is used in the construction of sentences, might appear to be insufficiently distinct from surface grammar...' I am sympathetic to the view that Wittgenstein's few words distinguishing

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suppose that meaning it is likewise an action.[...].However we do not say 'I intend to mean it this afternoon', 'I forgot to mean it', 'I got busy meaning it'.' (*The Philosophy of Wittgenstein: Method and Essence*, p. 154.)

[130] *Rush Rhees on Religion and Philosophy*, p. 173.

[131] One might suggest that, in fact, depth grammar is connected to a deeper *appreciation* of the words used, but philosophical statements or religious statements are not poetry. A deeper appreciation of poetry is distinctive, and we have to bear in mind Wittgenstein's understanding of depth grammar as the overall use, rather than what is apparent.

[132] *The Philosophy of Wittgenstein*, p.155.

surface and depth grammar are not be sufficient for the reader to reach a clear understanding of the contrasting features of these concepts. But for me it is clear that in the case of surface grammar it is what, in the construction of sentences immediately *impresses* us, which might mislead. *If* this leads us astray, then we have not paid attention enough to the depth grammar. Hunter himself is not clear on the matter. He claims that depth grammar's 'distinctness lies in the fact that it is not the grammar of the sentence with which we begin.'[133] What does he mean here? The distinctness of depth grammar lies not in the fact that it is not the grammar with which we begin, but in the fact that it is what is actually the case, what is *meant*, as opposed to the sense that a statement *seems* to have. Nothing changes in the grammar of the sentence; it does not become something else. It is how we understand a statement that is important, the kind of attention *we* give it. It is the role of the words within the statement, the sense they have that is important. He goes on to say that 'We must probe for depth-grammatical propositions, and it can require some know-how to list a sampling of the sentences that ought to be used, given any striking feature of the surface grammar'[134] This might lead one to suppose that one has to 'get to' depth-grammatical propositions. But this simply isn't the case; for the Wittgensteinian, the difficulty philosophers have is *seeing* statements for what *they are*. Depth grammar *is* the grammar (in the Wittgensteinian sense of grammar) of the sentence; it is how the concepts have been understood. To see the depth grammar is to appreciate the use of words for what they are. We are misled because we *fail* to see how the words are actually used to determine the sense of what is being said. Depth grammar is understood by Wittgenstein as being an inextricable part of grammatical investigation; it is the *focal point* of clarity. Philosophers who follow surface grammar are like the thinkers who are character-

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[133] *The Philosophy of Wittgenstein*, p.155.
[134] Ibid., p. 155.

ised in *Zettel*: '(The classifications of philosophers and psychologists: they classify clouds by their shape.)'[135] They are distracted by immediate impressions. To 'get to' the depth grammar is simply to *accurately* understand the role words or concepts play in utterances. What Hunter writes here *might* give the impression that depth grammar is a 'something', which itself could lead to the confusion of thinking that it is a 'right' something, and that it is something we can look for, that is 'deeper' in the sense that we have to get there; that philosophy is a *search* for depth grammatical propositions. This is not what Wittgenstein meant at all. One does not discover the 'depth grammar' as one discovers the truth about an empirical proposition (The truth of the following proposition: 'The Empire State building is the tallest building in the world', for example, is discovered through empirical investigation). It lies before us, and we can see it if we give a statement the right sort of attention. 'Depth grammar' is not 'correct grammar'. In summary, the contrast between surface and depth grammar is not 'between the surface and the 'geology' of expressions, but between the local surroundings which can be taken in at a glance, and the overall geography; that is, use of an expression.'[136]

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[135] *Zettel*, §462.
[136] *A Wittgenstein Dictionary*, p. 155.

When we come to Phillips' work within the philosophy of religion, to his discussions of religious discourse we can see that he places great importance on the distinction between surface and depth grammar. To understand what is meant within religious discourse, one must not be distracted by the initial appearance of religious statements but, 'one must determine the depth grammar of the concept to be investigated.'[137] One must consider the overall use of a word, an expression or a statement within the cultural context that gives it life. By applying the notion of surface and depth grammar to religion, Phillips shows the importance of certain aspects of language in a way that Wittgenstein would surely have approved: 'We are talking about the spatial and temporal phenomenon of language, not about some non-spatial, non temporal phantasm.'[138] He is showing the importance of context in understanding religious discourse. Phillips, throughout his body of work, gives us clear examples of how philosophers can be led astray by what appears to be being said within religious statements.

> We may be confused by the surface grammar of a proposition into thinking its logic is quite different from what would be revealed if we examined the actual contexts of its application (its depth grammar).[139]

And the notion of depth grammar is crucial for Phillips in his understanding of religious discourse, in that it underpins his attacks on those philosophers of religion, who, he feels, 'have paid too much attention to the surface grammar of religious state-

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[137] *The Concept of Prayer*, p. 13.
[138] *Philosophical Investigations*, §108.
[139] Phillips, D.Z. *Faith after Foundationalism*. Oxford: Westview Press, 1995, p. 218.

ments.'[140] At the end of his career, Phillips' position on this aspect of grammatical investigation was as it was at the beginning, in

> discussing what I take to be confused philosophical accounts of genuine religious beliefs. After all, it is the surface grammar of those beliefs, among other things, which may mislead us in the first place.[141]

We should remember the one thing that Wittgenstein explicitly tells us of surface grammar, that what 'immediately impresses itself upon us about the use of a word is the way it is used in the construction of the sentence.'[142] What this means for Phillips within the philosophy of religion is that some philosophers

> have assumed too readily that words such as 'existence', 'love', 'will', are used in the same way of God as they are used of human beings, animate and inanimate objects.[143]

Thinkers examining religious concepts might generalise, and assume such concepts are used in the same way within religion as without:

> Philosophers who, in discussing the existence of God, request an empirical verification, assume that they know what is meant by the reality of God. They assume that they know the conceptual category to which the reality of God belongs. But this is the primary question to be answered: what kind of philosophical account does the concept of divine reality call for?[144]

Philosophers who make the above assumption see the statement 'God exists' as a *kind* of empirical statement. And this, of course, determines the philosophical work that is to be done:

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[140] *The Concept of Prayer*, p. 8.
[141] Sanders, Andy F. (ed.) *D.Z. Phillips's Contemplative Philosophy of Religion*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007, p. 78.
[142] *Philosophical Investigations*, §664.
[143] *The Concept of Prayer*, p. 8.
[144] Ibid., p. 13.

Because the question of divine reality can be construed as 'Is God real or not?' it has often been assumed that the dispute between the believer and the unbeliever is over a *matter of fact*. The philosophical investigation of the reality of God then becomes the philosophical investigation appropriate to an assertion of a matter of fact.[145]

Such philosophers complacently assume that the conceptual framework within which they place God is the right one (or is philosophically unproblematic). But, according to Phillips, instead of assuming this, we need to *understand* with clarity what is being investigated.[146] To this end, 'one must determine the depth grammar of the concept to be investigated.' This, for Phillips, is what philosophers of religion often fail to do. The sentence 'I believe in God' might be *understood* in a similar way to the sentence 'I believe in Ghosts'; the expression 'I believe in God' being taken to imply *something* like I believe in the existence of ghosts, where the existence of ghosts, like the existence of any object can be proven by investigation. So, 'God' is being understood as one would understand what is meant by any (mysterious, otherworldly) object. The anthropologist, James Frazer, according to Wittgenstein, makes such mistakes:[147]

The accusation levelled against Frazer can be put in terms of surface and depth grammar. Inclined to interpret everything as a form of science, Frazer sees religious expressions of belief as constituting hypotheses or theories, and reli-

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[145] *Faith and Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 1.

[146] It is worth pointing out here that Phillips does not have to talk about grammar when discussing conceptual confusion, and indeed, as can be seen in the previous passages he gets his point across without referring to the term.

[147] This has great contemporary relevance. I will never forget the following statement by Richard Dawkins: 'You can't escape the scientific implications of religion. A universe with a God would look quite different from a universe without one. A physics, a biology where there is a God is bound to look different. So the most basic claims of religion *are* scientific. Religion *is* a scientific theory.' (Dawkins, Richard, The "know-nothings", the "know-alls", and the "no-contests" in *Nullifidian*, December, 1994. www.simonyi.ox.ac.uk/dawkins/WorldOfDawkinsarchive/Dawkins/Work/Articles/1994-12religion.shtml) He is not just saying that science and religion compete, but that the fundamental religious expressions *are* scientific. Compare this with Wittgenstein: 'Christianity is not a doctrine, not, I mean, a theory about what has happened and will happen to the human soul, but a description of something that actually takes place in life. For 'consciousness of sin' is a real event and so are despair and salvation through faith. Those who speak of such things (Bunyan for instance) are simply describing what has happened to them, whatever gloss anyone may want to put on it.'(*Culture and Value*, p. 28.)

gious practices as utilitarian actions aiming at the achievement of concrete empirical ends. Seen in such a manner, the conclusion must inevitably be that magic and religion are erroneous: ritual actions fail to influence the course of nature because their theoretical basis is radically defective.[...].If we move away from a surface view of ritual and attend instead to its depth grammar we will find in magic, he maintains, something other than a primitive attempt at science.[148]

And the important point is that *all* who are concerned with religion might fall into this way of thinking. The philosopher, the believer and the atheist can all be led astray by the language used. Non-believers might not 'believe' as they do not believe in U.F.O.'s, for example. They might feel that belief in God is as absurd, as childish, and escapist as the belief in some fantastical creature, and that science can show that this is the case. But for Phillips these people *might not* have appreciated the grammar of religious discourse.[149]

Phillips appears to be following Wittgenstein's conception of depth grammar: it concerns how words are *actually* used in the life of those who use them, rather than how they *appear* to be used. And this is what Phillips is after, and is what he means when he writes, at the very beginning of his career, that the philosopher 'must pay attention to what religious believers do and say.'[150] For Phillips, it is only by doing this that one can appreciate religious beliefs for what they are.

> One might come to see that the religion of certain believers is shallow or even that what they practise is not religion at all. The account of religion they give may be a distortion. This can be shown by revealing the depth grammar.[151]

[148] Clack, Brian. *An Introduction to Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Religion*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999, p. 61.
[149] John Worrell makes his position quite clear: 'I have made it clear that my whole argument rests on the assumption that a rational, scientific person needs good evidence before admitting God into her world view, just as she would before admitting, say, electrons into it.' (Worrell, John. 'Science Disproves Religion' in *Contemporary Debates in Philosophy of Religion*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2004, p. 71.)
[150] *The Concept of Prayer*, p. 1.
[151] Ibid., p. 11.

So, the depth grammar is the *actual* use of words, (rather than some presumed use that shows a failure to understand), and once it is revealed, confusions and mistakes (the failure to understand), become apparent. Here we can see that the philosopher does not take sides, but simply examines the language that is used.

I have said that Wittgenstein's brief discussion of depth and surface grammar is 'non-judgemental', in that he does not give them a strong pejorative force. But commentators might perceive that there is, at times, something *more* than this to Phillips' application of the notion of depth grammar to religious language. I do find this troubling, for if this is so then there is a *clear* divergence from Wittgenstein's intentions. But it is an easy mistake to make. Hans Zorn, for example, seems to make this mistake in a discussion of grammar and religion:

> For Wittgenstein, practice undergirds the grammars of the language games played within a community. A language game is structured by a depth grammar, which determines what can and cannot be sensibly expressed in it.[152]

Depth grammar does not *determine* what can be sensibly expressed, as we have seen, but, in the case of religion, it is simply revealed by paying attention to *what* is said.[153] Zorn is equating depth grammar with 'grammar' as in theology 'as grammar'. Phillips himself *seems* to make an unwarranted connection between depth grammar and the understanding of the word 'deep' that relates to what he sees as the language and understanding of 'genuine' religious believers; if this is so, then he has gone further than

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[152] Zorn, Hans. 'Grammar, Doctrines, and Practice'. *The Journal of Religion*. Vol. 75, No. 4 (October 1995), p. 510.

[153] It is worth clarifying the understanding of the word 'determine' in the Zorn passage and in other examples I have been using. It seems to me that it has been understood as to mean 'decide' whereas one might also see it as meaning 'to find out the facts about (something).' (Knight, Lorna (ed.) *Collins Paperback Dictionary and Thesaurus*. Glasgow: HarperCollins, 1994, p 160.)

Wittgenstein would want to go.[154] He writes, for example, that 'Depth grammar is made explicit by asking what can and cannot be said of the concept in question.'[155] Asking what can be said of God will reveal the depth grammar. But isn't it the case that revealing the depth grammar will show what is actually said or understood of God? There appears to be the implication here that depth grammar is a kind of answer to questions concerning what *can* be said of religious concepts. Phillips, in effect, is saying that the depth grammar of a religious statement is what is *genuinely* religious. What believers say might be mistaken (as we shall see shortly, Phillips acknowledges this), that is what they actually say, the depth grammar of their statements. Depth grammar concerns how words are *actually* used in life (in contrast to how one might take them to be used), here in religious contexts, but again, this does not necessarily mean that the way words are used in such contexts is the right way. Philosophers might be misled because they follow the surface grammar of statements by religious believers, but one *might* also be misled by the depth grammar of what is said. By following what the believers *actually* say (that is what they actually mean), one might 'get' what they are saying, without realising that what they are saying is confused. *They* might be misled by following the surface grammar of a religious text, for example. But Phillips *is* aware of this. Elsewhere he writes of believers that the 'account of religion they give may be a distortion. This can be shown by revealing the depth grammar of what they say.'[156] Here he *is* acknowledging that the depth grammar reveals what they are actually saying. And though depth grammar might show distortion, will all be receptive to it? Surface grammar will not reveal their confusion.

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[154] Wittgenstein does talk of depth in relation to philosophical confusion: 'The problems arising through a misinterpretation of our forms of language have the character of *depth*. They are deep disquietudes; their roots are as deep in us as the forms of our language and their significance is as great as the importance of our language.—Let us ask ourselves: why do we feel a grammatical joke to be *deep*? (and that is what the depth of philosophy is.)' (*Philosophical Investigations*, §111.)

[155] *The Concept of Prayer*, p. 8.

[156] Ibid., p. 11.

I wish now to return to the notion that philosophy 'leaves everything as it is' and to emphasise two different issues surrounding this controversial idea. The first is the contrast between theology (as grammar) and philosophy (as grammatical investigation), and the second is the importance this notion has for Phillips, in his understanding of philosophy of religion's role.

We should recall the comments of Wittgenstein that concern grammar and theology:

i) 'Grammar tells what kind of object anything is. (Theology as Grammar).'[157]

ii) 'How words are understood is not told by words alone (Theology.)'[158]

iii) '...theology is the grammar of the word "God"'[159]

These brief sentences have had a profound influence on Phillips' philosophy of religion, but to avoid confusion we need to be clear about the kind of role grammar and grammatical investigation have in the philosophy of religion in contrast to the role of theology within religion. What is the difference between theology as grammar[160] and philosophy as grammatical investigation? Or, indeed, *is* there a difference?[161] Phillips discusses theology and philosophy in the final chapter of his *Belief, Change and*

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[157] *Philosophical Investigations*, §373.

[158] *Zettel*, §144.

[159] 'Luther said that theology is the grammar of the word "God". I interpret this to mean that an investigation of the word would be an investigation of the word would be a grammatical one.' (Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Wittgenstein's Lectures: Cambridge*, 1932-1935. Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman & Littlefield, 1980, p. 32.)

[160] It is worth noting, as Hunter does in his paper, 'Wittgenstein on Grammar and Essence', that 'Grammar not only tells us what kind of object something is, and what kind of object it is not. It also tells us, according to Wittgenstein, whether it is any kind of object at all.' (Teghrarian, Souren (ed.) *Wittgenstein and Contemporary Philosophy*. Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1994, p. 81.)

[161] This is a question that Phillips ignores.

Forms of Life, in *Religion and Friendly Fire*, and exhaustively in *Faith after Founda-tionalism*, revealing his view that there is a *troubled* relation between these two areas of thought, bringing out his own particular conception of what the role of philosophy (and theology) is. For Phillips, philosophy's role *has* to be distinct from theology's role, and yet they are both connected to grammar in Wittgenstein's writings. So, how might theology be 'grammar' for Phillips?

> In Christianity, for example, we are told that it does not make sense to say that a man can love God while hating his fellow man. Theology, in this context, determines what can and cannot be said of God.[162]

In this passage, Phillips places theology within Christianity.[163] Theology here is grammar in that it 'determines' what 'can and cannot be said of God' within Christi-anity ('Grammar tells what kind of object anything is. (Theology as Grammar).'). But this isn't the only role theology has within Christianity, for Phillips. Elsewhere he talks of the theologian as 'the scholar of sacred pictures' or as 'guardians of the pic-tures.' The theologian, then, has a terrible responsibility:

> In elucidating them, they must endeavour to be faithful to their content. What is more, pictures clash and develop. There may be calls, of various kinds, to change or modify the pictures. This is a task to be performed, it seems to me, with fear and trembling, since it is concerned with nothing less than the possi-bility of seeing God or the divine in the picture.[164]

In this passage Phillips makes it clear that, for him, theology has a particular function, as a 'guardian of the picture' (I take this to mean, in part at least, that as grammar,

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[162] Phillips, D.Z. *Belief, Change and Forms of Life*. London: MacMillan, 1986, p. 113.

[163] I think that Phillips is being careless here. Christianity does not say that it doesn't make sense to say that a man can love God while hating his fellow man. It surely makes sense but indicates a hypocritical attitude. I presume that Phillips took this notion from The First Epistle of John, where it is written that 'If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?' (*John* I, 4:20)

[164] *Religion and Friendly Fire*, p. 88.

theology governs what can be said of religious concepts) and theologians must be faithful to that picture. For Phillips, then, there are tensions between what philosophy is able to do and what theology does: 'philosophy itself cannot lay down what sort of God people are to worship.'[165] While theology 'determines what can and cannot be said of God.' Philosophy is 'neither for nor against religion',[166] but theology must go further than this. We can illustrate the point by examining what Phillips sees as two important similarities between theology and philosophy, and the limitations of these similarities. The first similarity can be found in the questions they seek to address, and the second is what they strive for. Both the philosopher and theologian might concern themselves, for example, with 'the question of whether the doctrine of creation implies a hypothesis about the origin of the species.' So they might be interested in similar questions. And this is connected to the second similarity between philosophy and theology: the desire for clarity. According to Phillips, 'The theologian is the servant of a faith and it is in order to enhance that faith that he wants to be clear about it. The clarity is a means to a further end'[167] But while the philosopher is concerned with clarity, in Phillips' view this is an end in itself. It is *this* contrast between these two areas of thought that is emphasised in Phillips' writings: once clarity has been achieved, there will be no further need for philosophy.[168] So, for Phillips, Philosophy is neither for nor against religion. It is grammatical investigation. Theology is not. Theology *is* grammar. Theology tells the faithful how to use the word 'God':[169]

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[165] *Belief Change and Forms of Life*, p. 113.

[166] *The Concept of Prayer*, p. 10.

[167] *Belief, Change and Forms of Life*, p. 113.

[168] From Wittgenstein: 'The real discovery is the one that makes me capable of stopping doing philosophy when I want to.[...].problems are solved (difficulties eliminated), not a *single* problem...'But then we will never come to the end of our job!' Of course not, because it has no end.' (Quoted in *Ludwig Wittgenstein: the Duty of Genius*, p. 325.)

[169] Again, Phillips takes this from *his* understanding of Wittgenstein: '...theology is the grammar of the word "God"' (*Zettel*, §144.) And: 'Grammar tells what kind of object anything is. (Theology as Grammar).' (*Philosophical Investigations*, §373.)

A theological grammar seems to be the plotting of the co-ordinates of the tradition, marking as explicitly as possible what can and cannot be said.[170]

But what does Phillips mean by 'the plotting of the co-ordinates of the tradition'? He is saying that theology sets out what can and cannot be said, both for the present and the future. According to Phillips, philosophy is not *concerned* with governing what can and cannot be said within religion. It

will be interested in the phenomenon of co-operating and conflicting grammars. It will note the role of theology as grammar, and the kind of thing that counts as judgements of right and wrong in these contexts.[171]

Philosophy is interested in revealing the depth grammar of what is said. Concerning the responsibility of theology that was discussed above, Phillips writes:

This responsibility does not fall on philosophy which, in its concern with reality, is concerned with the sense of things, including different conceptions of truth, and the differences involved, in different contexts, in determining what the truth is. Its concern with conceptual confusion is such that pointing it out may show that certain truth-claims cannot be sustained because they are unintelligible. Beyond such confusion, however, a variety will remain. Philosophy has to do conceptual justice by it, but it cannot itself be the arbiter of truth.[172]

So far I have accepted what Phillips says on the differences between theology and philosophy. But I think that we need to be cautious here. It is understandable *why* Phillips wishes to distance philosophy from theology.[173] But surely theologians will protest at his distinction between theology and philosophy, for aren't theologians of-

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[170] *Belief, Change and Forms of Life*, p. 115.
[171] Ibid., p. 115.
[172] *Religion and Friendly Fire*, p. 88.
[173] Phillips' views on theology, however, might not be acceptable to many theologians. In the passage I have just given, for example, he is aligning theological statements with doctrinal statements. There is no attempt on his part to distinguish between theology as a discipline and religious doctrine.

ten doing philosophical work? Phillips draws a parallel between grammatical statements and 'theological' statements:

> It seems to me that theological or doctrinal statements...are giving us rules for the use of the word 'God'. Within this use we may disagree about a particular application of the concept. We may argue over whether it is proper to speak of an incident as an expression of God's love. But in saying 'God is love' we are being taught one of the meanings of the word 'God'.[174]

To say 'God is love' is to say something about the use of the word 'God'. *That* is why we might consider it grammatical. It is 'a rule for the use of the word 'God''[175] ''God is not love' would not be a denial of an attribute which God happens to have, as John happens to be tall, but a denial of the reality of God...' Grammatical investigation into the statement 'God is love' merely aims for clarity. It is a conscious move away from those within the philosophy of religion who would treat it as something similar to an empirical proposition. Care needs to be taken, however, when aligning theology with grammar. Robert L. Arrington, for example, gives the following statement:

> According to Wittgenstein, theological statements are grammatical rules guiding religious action and feeling – as well as guiding occasional descriptive claims about particular persons or events. He thinks the most egregious error of the philosopher would be to take theological propositions as factual claims about the world.[176]

Arrington's statement is worrying; it highlights a danger for those applying Wittgenstein's thought to religion. Wittgenstein did not *say* what Arrington attributes to him, that 'theological statements are grammatical rules guiding religious action and feeling.' This, I suggest is reading too much into what was, after all, an ambiguous re-

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[174] *Faith after Foundationalism*, p. 216.
[175] *Belief, Change and Forms of Life*, p. 112.
[176] Arrington, Robert L. and Addis, Mark (eds.) *Wittgenstein and Philosophy of Religion*. London: Routledge, 2001, p. 173.

mark. And he goes further. He suggests that the statement 'God exists and is my crea-

tor' is not the

> belief in a contingent causal connection between God the creator and myself
> as his creature. It is not the kind of belief that requires evidential support of the
> kind we demand for beliefs in the reality of contingent causal connections.
> Likewise, 'God exists' does not express a belief in the contingent reality of
> God, a belief that as a matter of fact this being exists. But for Wittgenstein it
> nevertheless expresses a belief – in another *sense* of 'belief'. The other possi-
> bility is this: the belief in the existence of God as a causally efficacious divine
> being is the acceptance of the grammatical statement 'God exists and is my
> creator.' Such a statement tells us how we are to talk of God, namely as an ex-
> istent being – not as one who may or may not exist – and as a being who is my
> creator. To talk of God at all is to talk of such a being, for that is what the reli-
> gious believer means by God.[177]

Again, Arrington is saying things here that Wittgenstein did not say. He suggests that

talk of God is talk of an existent *being*, rather than of something whose existence is

debatable. He goes on to suggest that 'Wittgenstein stresses the fact that religious be-

lievers do not hold their central beliefs with probability or well-grounded confidence;

they hold them with certainty...' Where the statement 'God exists and is my creator'

is concerned, the

> believer does not think he has good or convincing evidence that God is the
> creator of the world. Belief in a causally efficacious divine being is not an ac-
> ceptance of a hypothesis, not even an exceptionally well-grounded one.[178]

The believer's belief is 'totally removed from the traffic of debate and argument, one

that has no uncertainty attached to it.' Now, this might sound convincing to those who

want belief in God to mean belief in a something, a being, but Arrington goes on to

write that 'it is precisely this type of belief or proposition that Wittgenstein labels

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[177] Ibid., p. 175.
[178] Ibid., p. 176.

'grammatical'.[...].'God exists and is my creator' is, for the religious believer, a grammatical proposition.'[179] There are two problems here. The first is that it is hard to imagine that when a believer utters a religious statement, he is uttering a *grammatical* statement. Rush Rhees gives the following quote: 'God is not an *object.*', and writes that 'this is a grammatical proposition, of course. It is comparable to 'The world is not an object''. We can say that 'God is not an object' is a grammatical statement; it is not a religious statement. When the believer says 'God is my creator', he is expressing something about his belief (the statement might be, for example, *confessional*), about his relationship with God. Rather than saying it is a grammatical statement, it would be better to say that such a statement is grammatically *interesting* (it might be interesting because it does not conform to the sense that we are tempted to give it); to say it is grammatical is a clumsy way of describing what is, after all, an expression of profound importance to the believer. It might be of interest to the philosopher in investigating religious beliefs to contemplate the grammar of such a statement. Returning to the passage by Arrington, the second problem I have with it is that it makes a clear break from Wittgenstein's understanding of the matter. We have seen that Wittgenstein distinguished between grammatical and empirical propositions. And yet Arrington seems to be saying that 'God exists and is my creator' is, in a sense, both grammatical and empirical, or at least it is *like* an empirical statement (I have shown that a grammatical statement might, in some circumstances, operate as an empirical statement); but for him it is the certainty of the belief that makes it grammatical. This follows on from Wittgenstein's remark that 'To accept a proposition as unshakably certain – I want to say – means to use it as a grammatical one: this removes uncertainty

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[179] Ibid., p. 176.

from it.'[180] A grammatical statement has a specific function. 'The 'truth' of a grammatical proposition', writes Glock, consists in 'accurately expressing a rule.'[181] It would be absurd to apply this to a believer's expression of a belief, though he operates *within* the rules ('Grammar tells us what kind of object anything is. (Theology as grammar).') The believer's statement is not telling us anything (in the sense that a grammatical statement tells us about the use of words) but is an expression of the person's devotion to God. It is a statement of worship.

Before I finish the chapter, I wish to emphasise the *significance* of Wittgenstein's view that philosophy 'leaves everything as it is' within the philosophy of religion. I have shown that Phillips, in using this phrase was referring to the method rather than to the results of philosophy. He is not, for example, saying that all expressions of religious belief are fine as they are; that they should be left alone. He does, however, sometimes speak as though his method looks to *the use by believers* of religious language, as if to show that what the believers say is what is so; it might appear to be the case that what he is suggesting is that we only need to look at what believers say to be *given* the right understanding of religious language ('What I wish to urge is that one can only give a satisfactory account of religious beliefs if one pays attention to the roles they play in people's lives.'[182]). *This* is how some understand the notion of 'leaving everything as it is': what believers say is fine, we don't need to question it. We simply need to note what is said. From Brian Clack: 'the proper (and properly Wittgensteinian) approach would simply be to acknowledge and report...different perspectives.'[183] Here is a sentence from his *The Concept of Prayer*:

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[180] *Lectures on the Foundations of Mathematics*, p 81.
[181] *A Wittgenstein Dictionary*, p. 151.
[182] Phillips, D.Z. *Faith and Philosophical Enquiry*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970, p. 67.
[183] Clack, Brian. 'Religion and Wittgenstein's Legacy'. *Ars Disputandi*. Volume 5 (2005), p. 3.

> What he [Wittgenstein] is saying is that if the philosopher wants to give an account of religion, he must pay attention to what religious believers do and say.[184]

Phillips, however, strongly resists the understanding that would see him as an apologist and would oppose any interpretation that sees him saying that that things are actually left as they are, that what the believer says is unproblematic. Again, leaving everything as it is

> does not refer to the results of Wittgenstein's method, but to its character. Wittgenstein is saying that philosophy has everything it needs at hand for the clarity it aims for. It is already at the place it wants to understand.[185]

In *Belief, Change and Forms of Life*, discussing a Christian philosophy of religion, he emphasises that Wittgensteinian philosophy is not inactive as some commentators think it is:

> All we have to do is to reflect on the way it speaks of familiar concepts. But if that way of speaking is confused, philosophical enquiry will certainly not leave it where it is.[186]

Phillips has *never* said that the believers are always right, or that philosophy should defer to the believer. He does not mean that one should *listen* to the believer as though he has real authority. But, as we shall see, Phillips has not done enough to combat the temptation to see him as a *kind of* apologist, because he wants to leave things as they are. For while he did not want to hold such a position, there is a feeling among critics that he nevertheless commits himself to this view. And, rather inevitably, his position is then exposed as being almost fraudulent because, as we shall see later in the thesis,

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[184] *The Concept of Prayer*, p. 1.
[185] *Religion and Friendly Fire*, p. 12.
[186] *Belief, Change and Forms of Life*, p. 12.

he goes on to say what he thinks *true* religious belief is, his understanding of which, it seems, is a long way from the ordinary believer's understanding.

All Phillips *is* suggesting here, however, is that if we want to *understand* what is being said or done, we should *look at* what is said and done and the contexts in which they *are* said and done. To say this is not to imply that what the believers say is *always* going to be philosophically acceptable. It might not even make sense. It is important, for Phillips, to recognize that

> one cannot take a short-cut in this matter, simply by asking believers for their descriptions in this sense. The ability to give a philosophical account of one's belief is not the same as the ability to believe. So the account given by a believer has no automatic philosophical warrant. It, too, must be conceptually faithful to the belief. If we say, 'who better to ask than the believers?', we should reflect on the fact that if we asked 'thinking people' what they meant by 'thinking', a confused Cartesianism would be returned with a thumping majority. We cannot do philosophy by gallup poll. Religion, like 'thinking', can be the victim of widespread friendly fire.[187]

We may find that the believer is terribly misguided, that he succumbs to superstition, or we might see that his belief is a 'deep' belief, that it plays a profound role in his life.[188] But what importance can it have for the believer? Can the Wittgensteinian philosophical method aid the religious believer in his belief? Might it turn the believer away from his religion?

> As a result of such clarification, someone may see dimly that religious beliefs are not what he had taken them to be. He may stop objecting to them, even though he does not believe in them. Someone else may find that now he is able

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[187] *D.Z. Phillips's Contemplative Philosophy of Religion*, p. 78.

[188] Phillips *was* aware that many critics see tension between his view that the meaning of religious statements is to be found in the contexts in which they are used and what believers actually say: 'Wittgensteinians claim that the final appeal in matters of meaning is to our practices. But who is to establish the meaning of the practices? Surely, to be consistent, the Wittgensteinian must say: those who engage in them. But when it actually comes to asking those who hold them what they mean by their religious beliefs, Wittgensteinians draw back from doing so. They do not practice what they preach.' (*Religion and Friendly Fire*, p.6.)

to believe. Another person may hate religion more than he did before the philosophical clarification.[189]

So, Phillips does not accept the notion that philosophy *actually* leaves everything as it is once its work is done; we should remember what was said earlier, that 'Wittgenstein's methodological views must ultimately be judged by their results.'[190] This is how we should assess the success of Phillips' approach. The believer might have a new perspective on his belief. It might weaken, disappear or become stronger. This means, then, that such an approach can have quite a profound effect on the believer, on his life, on the way he lives his life. Even if the philosopher or believer only sees dimly that religious beliefs are not what he thought them to be, the work has been done.

Phillips thinks philosophy can allow one to see that beliefs that might have a strong hold on the believer are illusory; perhaps these have been given what seems like a firm foundation by bad philosophy. These points are important, for they suggest that one does not *need* to do much to change a person's view. The change in the believer might be profound, leading to a clearer understanding of his beliefs, which might turn out to be nothing but illusions (This, of course, fits in with Wittgenstein's ambitions: 'What we are destroying is nothing but houses of cards.'[191]) founded on faulty thinking. A striking example of how this might work for the believer (and of the effects of understanding) can be found in Tolstoy's *Confession*:

> S., a clever and truthful man, once told me the story of how he ceased to believe. On a hunting expedition, when he was already twenty-six, he once, at the place where they put up for the night, knelt down in the evening to pray – a habit retained from childhood. His elder brother, who was at the hunt with

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[189] *The Concept of Prayer*, p.23.
[190] *A Wittgenstein Dictionary*, p. 295.
[191] *Philosophical Investigations*, §118.

him, was lying on some hay and watching him. When S. had finished and was settling down for the night, his brother said to him: 'So you still do that?'

They said nothing more to one another. But from that day S. ceased to say his prayers or go to church. And now he has not prayed or received communion, for thirty years. And this not because he knows his brother's convictions and has joined him in them, nor because he has decided anything in his own soul, but simply because a word spoken by his brother was like the push of a finger on a wall that was ready to fall by its own weight. The word only showed that where he thought there was faith, in reality there had long been an empty space, and that therefore the utterance of words and the making of signs of the cross and genuflections while praying were quite senseless actions. Becoming conscious of their senselessness he could not continue them.[192]

Clarity might be like 'the push of a finger' on a weakened wall, exposing difficulties that we had not recognised as difficulties, for example. Phillips' adoption of 'descriptive' philosophy, despite its varied flaws and failings, can show the philosopher, and perhaps more importantly, the believer, that where he thought there was 'faith' there is only 'an empty space', and that the words used, are 'quite senseless'. The young man, as a consequence of appreciating what we *might* call the depth grammar of the religious discourse, of seeing the sense of what is said within his church, found that it was a sham and that his beliefs were nonsense: 'Becoming conscious of their senselessness he could not continue them'. And once a person has a clear understanding of his beliefs, there is no further role for the philosopher. In this case the young man rejected his religion; he did not see his religion in a positive light (Phillips would say that this is of no concern for the philosopher). In another, in *Tolstoy's* case, for example, there arose a new understanding of what religion could be.

If the most important words of the Ectene became increasingly clear to me, and even if I somehow managed to interpret the words: 'And remembering Our Sovereign Lady, Holy Mother of God, and all the saints, ourselves and one another, let us all devote our entire life to Christ, Our Lord'; and even if I interpreted the frequent repetition of prayers for the Tsar and his family by the fact that they are more exposed to temptation than others, and therefore in

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[192] Tolstoy, Leo. *A Confession and other Religious Writings.* London: Penguin, 1987, p. 20.

greater need of prayer, and the prayers for the subjugation of our enemies and adversaries by saying that they are evil, nevertheless these prayers and others...had no meaning or made me feel that in giving it meaning I was lying and thereby destroying my relation with God and losing all possibility of faith.[193]

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[193] Ibid., p. 20.

Chapter 2

Wittgenstein's Language-games

Introduction

In the previous chapter I began by addressing a common criticism of the Wittgensteinian method, given by Herbert Marcuse. This criticism is that Wittgenstein is advocating a philosophical approach that is intellectually conservative. He claims that philosophy 'leaves everything as it is',[194] and 'neither explains nor deduces anything',[195] and that we, as philosophers, 'must do away with all *explanation*, and description alone must take its place.'[196] Such comments have convinced some philosophers that the approach is conservative. I suggested that while Wittgenstein did not aim for 'scientific, technical or like achievements',[197] for example, he did want to do much within philosophy, to change the way people think.

Philosophy, for Wittgenstein, aims at clarification of language use, for confusions are found in a 'misunderstanding of the logic of our language.'[198] Of particular importance when considering Wittgenstein's method and Marcuse's reaction to it, is to distinguish between the *character* of philosophical method and the results. As Phillips writes, leaving everything as it is 'does not refer to the results of Wittgenstein's method, but to its character.'[199] As Phillips notes, 'Does anyone seriously suppose that Wittgenstein is committed to saying that philosophical investigation leaves con-

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[194] *Philosophical Investigations*, §124.
[195] Ibid., §126.
[196] Ibid., §109.
[197] *One Dimensional Man*, p. 173.
[198] *Philosophical Investigations*, §93.
[199] *Religion and Friendly Fire*, p. 12.

fusion where it is?'[200] I think that it is important to acknowledge that some philosophers *do* think that Wittgenstein 'leaves things as they are', so it is necessary to clarify what Wittgenstein's method actually is, and what it achieves.

In the next section, then, I examined the nature of Wittgenstein's descriptive method, and highlighted some dangers that can arise when trying to understand it. I introduced the notions of 'grammar' and 'grammatical investigation', as inextricable parts of Wittgenstein's method. It is, I suggested, Wittgenstein's understanding of grammar that makes his philosophy distinctive. I showed that Wittgensteinian grammatical investigation is an investigation into the use, or the meaning of words (their sense). I suggested that the motivation for such investigations is the removal of misunderstandings. Of great importance for Wittgenstein, though he only mentions them briefly, are the notions of 'surface' and 'depth' grammar. Surface grammar is described by Wittgenstein as follows: 'What immediately impresses itself upon us about the use of a word is the way it is used in the construction of the sentence, the part of its use-one might say-that can be taken in by the ear.'[201] But while surface grammar is what immediately impresses us, depth grammar is the *actual* use of words, or understandings of concepts: 'And now compare the depth grammar, say of the word "to mean", with what its surface grammar would lead us to suspect.'[202] The surface grammar, then, might mislead us; we might be led astray to philosophically problematic understandings. Philosophical investigation should show us the depth grammar, how words are actually used, and whether surface grammar is *philosophically* problematic.

I then examined the role of Wittgenstein's grammar in Phillips' philosophy of religion. Depth grammar is of crucial importance for Phillips, for he feels that philoso-

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[200] Ibid., p. 12.
[201] *Philosophical Investigations*, §664.
[202] Ibid., §664.

phers of religion 'have paid too much attention to the surface grammar of religious statements.'[203] They might, for example, take religious statements to be something like empirical statements. I emphasised that the depth grammar of religious statements reveals what is actually said by religious believers, what they actually *mean*. So depth grammar is understood by Phillips as being how words are *actually* used, rather than how they *appear* to be used. But I suggested that this does not necessarily mean that the words are understood correctly; depth grammar is *not* correct grammar, but is what is actually said or written. I then moved on to discuss Phillips' understanding of theology (as grammar) and its relation to philosophy (as grammatical investigation), examining issues surrounding this. I expressed some sympathy with Phillips' view, but suggested that while he was keen to emphasise that theology exists within Christian culture, as a defender of the faith, and that philosophy is concerned with clarity, he underestimated the philosophy that exists *within* theology. Finally I returned to the notion of 'leaving everything as it is' and the importance it has for the philosophy of religion.

What makes Phillips' approach to philosophy of religion so unpalatable to those who oppose it, and so difficult to defend for those who *are* sympathetic, is, in part, to be found in the language *Wittgenstein* uses. Words, phrases and expressions, employed by Wittgenstein, for example, to clarify important features of language (and about which Wittgenstein was never particularly precise) have been adopted by Phillips and used *within* the philosophy of religion, a subject area that Wittgenstein never referred to when using such terms and phrases.

Most difficult of all, perhaps, are his language-games and the use of certain terms in connection with these. Fundamental, is the *analogy* between language and games,

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[203] *The Concept of Prayer*, p. 8.

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and the complications arising from this. The complications are profound, so we must clarify what it is about his understanding and use of language that has left him exposed to criticism. So, before coming to issues surrounding Phillips' understanding of language-games we need to examine how they are used by Wittgenstein.[204] I think it is crucial to spend some time looking at them and the philosophical difficulties that arise.[205]

Most importantly, we need to identify all the problems that can be associated with the use of the term 'language-game' (it is unfortunate that Wittgenstein sometimes talks as though there is something *more* than analogy being employed here, for, as we shall see, there have been unnecessary complications arising from how his use of the analogy has been understood), the consequences that these have, that we witness in contemporary philosophy of religion. Wittgenstein was aiming for clarity, and yet for Ninian Smart:

> ...one can hardly imagine a more inappropriate linking of terms than the one incorporated in the phrase 'language-game'. Instead of serving any useful or enlightening purpose, it can only tend to confusion and obscurity.[206]

One can sympathise with Smart here. The concept appears to have no clear meaning, is slippery, confusing; it *seems* that Wittgenstein is inconsistent in its application, that the analogy is a poor one. It is important, therefore, to address such worries. What

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[204] Mention Phillips to philosophers not particularly familiar with his work and the response is likely to concern his use of the concept of language-games, and difficulties this creates for him within the philosophy of religion.

[205] As we shall see, much of the discussion that has arisen concerning Wittgenstein's language-games is *philosophically* unnecessary, and, I suggest, obscures Wittgenstein's simple message.

[206] Quoted in Specht, Ernst Konrad. 'The Language-game as Model Concept in Wittgenstein's Theory of language' in *The Philosophy of Wittgenstein*, p. 47.

importance do language-games have, what is their role in the philosophy of religion, why talk of games at all?[207] What contribution do they make to philosophy?

There is no escaping the term 'language-game'; it was clearly of utmost importance to Wittgenstein, and occupies a central position in the philosophy that followed: 'No word evokes Wittgenstein's later writings more powerfully than "language-game"'.[208] I think that Max Black is right, but it is the *reasons* why the term has become so associated with Wittgenstein and Phillips that underpin our investigations here. I wish, then, to focus on those features of Wittgenstein's language-games that are most problematic, and that have proved most contentious. What follows, therefore, is necessarily selective.

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[207] It is interesting to note that there is more to the word than we might think: 'While 'game' is the best translation for *Spiel*, it is worth remembering that the German word is rather broader in scope than our 'game, and covers freeform activities that in English would be called 'play' rather than 'games'.' (Stern, David G. *Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. p. 89.)

[208] Black, Max. 'Wittgenstein's Language-games' in *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Critical Assessments, Volume 2*. Beckenham: Croom Helm, 1986, p. 74.

Broadly, one might say that there are two forms of language-game that Wittgenstein

refers to in his later writings (perhaps one should say that there are earlier and later, or

simpler and more elaborate conceptions), that play different roles in philosophy.[209]

The first is that type to which the famous 'builders'' example belongs; it is fictional

(or imaginary), used, for instance, to clarify facts of language (this particular example

simply consists of a man calling out the name of a particular building material and

another bringing it to him.) and in so doing, showing that Augustine's understanding

of language is too simple to be applicable in life.[210] The second are those we actually

use:

> Review the multiplicity of language-games in the following examples, and in
> others:
> Giving orders, and obeying them-
> Describing the appearance of an object, or giving its measurements-
> Constructing the appearance of an object, or giving its measurements-
> Constructing an object from a description (a drawing)-
> Reporting an event-
> Speculating about an event-
> Forming and testing a hypothesis-
> Presenting the results of an experiment in tables and diagrams-
> Making up a story; and reading it-
> Play-acting-
> Singing catches-
> Guessing riddles-

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[209] To avoid unnecessary complications I distinguish between the imaginary and 'real' examples only when necessary. They are *fundamentally* the same thing: language woven into action. And yet the former often seem to be, as John Cook would have it 'daft': 'Wittgenstein thought that he was entitled to create bizarre stories and that we mustn't dismiss them on the grounds that we cannot understand them.' (Cook, John W. 'Wittgenstein and Religious Belief'. *Philosophy*. Vol. 63, No. 246 (October 1998), p. 438.) I want to examine the worth of such examples, *as examples*, later in the chapter. I feel sympathy with Cook on *this* point, but perhaps he is reacting to what commentators have made of the examples.

[210] We should be aware of alternative understandings to that which I offer here. These can be found, for example, in chapter four of David G. Stern's *Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations: an Introduction*. These understandings relate to what Wittgenstein was doing introducing a passage from Augustine at the beginning of the *Investigations*, and the *apparently* simplistic interpretation and use of him by Wittgenstein.

Making a joke; telling it-
Solving a problem in practical arithmetic-
Translating from one language into another-
Asking, thanking, cursing, greeting, praying.[211]

He uses these to show, for example, how varied language-games can be and the danger of following the rules of one language-game when using another (I shall clarify this a little later), and perhaps most importantly: 'Here the term "language-*game*" is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life.'[212] Both the 'factual' and fictional examples simply consist of language and action, and it is this that unites them. The closest Wittgenstein comes to a definition highlights this: 'I shall also call the whole, consisting of language and the actions into which it is woven, the "language-game".' [213]

This chapter will focus on the 'imaginary' building example. But in order to come to a clear understanding of Wittgenstein's language-games we must at least acknowledge why he introduced such simple examples of language and action at the very beginning of the *Investigations*, the context within which he introduced such examples. Wittgenstein gives us the following:[214]

When we look at such simple forms of language, the mental mist which seems to enshroud our ordinary use of language disappears. We see activities, reactions, which are clear-cut and transparent.[215]

And, later,

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[211] *Philosophical Investigations*, §23.
[212] Ibid., §23.
[213] Ibid., §7.
[214] Here is the quote in full: 'If we want to study the problems of truth and falsehood, of the agreement and disagreement of propositions with reality, of the nature of assertion, assumption, and question, we shall with great advantage look at the primitive forms of language in which these forms of thinking appear without the confusing background of highly complicated processes of thought. When we look at such simple forms of language, the mental mist which seems to enshroud our ordinary use of language disappears. We see activities, reactions, which are clear-cut and transparent.' (*The Blue and Brown Books*, p. 17.)
[215] Ibid., p. 17.

It disperses the fog to study the phenomena of language in primitive kinds of application in which one can command a clear view of the aim and functioning of the words.[216]

So, these 'primitive forms' lack 'the confusing back ground of highly complicated processes of thought'. Examining them we *should* find that 'the mental mist which seems to enshroud our ordinary use of language disappears.' According to Wittgenstein, it is clarity we achieve through looking at language in this way. The difference, then, between these examples and 'everyday' language-games is the position they occupy within Wittgenstein's philosophical method. The imaginary examples are used as an illustrative tool, some more critical than others. And it is through these examples that the understanding of language offered by Augustine is first scrutinized.[217] It is at the beginning of the *Investigations* that he famously quotes Augustine:

> When they (my elders) named some object, and accordingly moved towards something, I saw this and I grasped that the thing was called by the sound they uttered when they meant to point it out. Their intention was shewn by their bodily movements, as it were the natural language of all peoples: the expression of the face, the play of the eyes, the movement of other parts of the body, and the tone of voice which expresses our state of mind in seeking, having, rejecting, or avoiding something. Thus, as I heard words repeatedly used in their proper places in various sentences, I gradually learnt to understand what objects they signified; and after I had trained my mouth to form these signs, I used them to express my own desires.[218]

Within the builders' example, words appear to be used in agreement with Augustine: they appear to identify objects for a purpose that requires this kind of understanding

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[216] *Philosophical Investigations*, §5.

[217] The following is by McGinn: 'The beauty of the passage from Augustine is that it presents us with the first, primitive impulse to theorize about language, to try to explain or model how it functions. It therefore allows Wittgenstein to focus that much more clearly both on its origins in the forms of our language and on the contrast between this movement towards abstraction and explanation and his own attempt to get us to look at language when it is functioning within the everyday, practical lives of speakers.' (*Wittgenstein and the Philosophical Investigations*, p. 37.)

[218] *Philosophical Investigations*, §1.

('...we are looking at words as though they all were proper names...';[219] words name objects (and the objects are the meanings), in this case 'slab'), but this isn't where the importance of the example lies (I will be drawing this out shortly). Ultimately, Wittgenstein uses them to show how inadequate certain conceptions to be found in philosophy are.[220] In the first section of the *Investigations* he writes:

> Augustine does not speak of there being any difference between kinds of word. If you describe the learning of language in this way you are, I believe, thinking primarily of nouns like "table", "chair", "bread", and of people's names, and only secondarily of the names of certain other actions and properties; and of the remaining kinds of word as something that will take care of itself.[221]

He thinks that Augustine does not appreciate the complexity of language, as a 'rich and varied form of life',[222] and because of this his view is limited. He focuses on certain linguistic features, abstracting them from the life and activities in which they exist. And of course, by doing this, one is in danger of missing how words are *actually* used by those speaking the language. Wittgenstein gives an initial example through which he criticizes this picture of language, by illustrating the very different roles words (here 'five', 'red' and 'apples') have:

> I send someone shopping. I give him a slip marked "five red apples". He takes the slip to the shopkeeper, who opens the drawer marked "apples"; then he looks up the word "red" in a table and finds a colour sample opposite it; then he says the series of cardinal numbers – I assume he knows them by heart – up

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[219] *The Blue and Brown Books*, p. 17.
[220] Some may be puzzled by Wittgenstein's decision to begin the *Philosophical Investigations* with a passage from Augustine. According to Norman Malcolm, '...he revered the writings of St. Augustine. He told me he decided to begin his *Investigations* with a quotation from the latter's *Confessions*, not because he could not find the conception expressed in that quotation stated as well by other philosophers, but because the conception *must* be important if so great a mind held it.' (*Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir*, p. 7.1)
[221] *Philosophical Investigations*, §1.
[222] *A Companion to Wittgenstein's "Philosophical Investigations"*, p. 99.

to the word "five" and for each number he takes an apple of the same colour as the sample out of the drawer.[223]

Wittgenstein shows us the use of language (though simplified) at work *within* everyday life; when we are shown the activity of language within life, we can see the variety of roles words have (each is used differently): 'The purpose of this language-game is to exhibit the various and multiple ways in which words function.'[224] And they are not simply expressing a mental state.[225] The importance of language use here is to stimulate activity.

> 'Five', 'red', and 'apple' are words each one of which belongs to a type the use of which is fundamentally different from the use of words of the other types. To say that 'apple' is the name of a fruit, 'red' the name of a colour, and 'five' the name of a number would mask deep differences beneath superficial similarities. Again, one might think, 'apple' involves correlation with an object, 'red' with a colour, and 'five' with counting objects of a type, so all words involve correlation with something. The web of deception is readily woven.[226]

Talking of the above example Wittgenstein writes:

> It is in this and similar ways that one operates with words.-"But how does he know where and how he is to look up the word 'red' and what is he to do with the word 'five'?"-Well, I assume that he *acts* as I have described. Explanations come to an end somewhere.-But what is the meaning of the word "five"?- No such thing was in question here, only how the word "five" is used.[227]

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[223] *Philosophical Investigations*, §1.
[224] Clack, Brian. *An Introduction to Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Religion*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999, p. 14.
[225] Augustine thinks that language expresses thoughts which originate within: 'Then, little by little, I realised where I was and wished to tell my wishes to those who might satisfy them, but I could not! For my wants were inside me, and they were outside, and they could not by any power of theirs come into my soul. And so I would fling my arms and legs about and cry, making the few and feeble gestures that I could...' (St. Augustine. *Confessions*. New York: Dover Publications, 2002, p.12.)
[226] Baker, G.P. & Hacker, P.M.S. *An Analytical Commentary on Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983, p. 24.
[227] *Philosophical Investigations*, §1.

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What Wittgenstein highlights in this example is that Augustine's notion of language is not wholly adequate.[228] He wants to show that language has a firm place within culture, and the lives and activities of those who exist within the culture. Wittgenstein is showing us language in action, in activities common within life. He is showing that the meaning of each of the words used is inextricable from activity, and that from looking at the use of the words we can resist the temptation to ask certain questions, such as 'what object is the word 'red'?' The words in the example have different uses. For this, one does not need to ask the question (that might arise) *within* the framework of thinking that the meaning of a word refers to 'something', an object (something unchangeable, some essence; words are used in very many different ways). We can look to the use, and see what is actually happening.

> Of course, W.'s point is that there is nothing left to say about the meaning of the 'five' (properly understood) after its use has been described. The meaning of a word is given by specification of its use, and this can be done without answering questions such as 'Of what is "five" the name?' or 'What does "five" stand for?' There is no need to answer what, on the Augustinian picture of language, is the fundamental question.[229]

In the second, 'builder's', example he gives a further illustration of a feature of the Augustinian view, and it is this example that has attracted attention. So, Wittgenstein famously asks us to imagine a language which

> is meant to serve for communication between a builder A and an assistant B. A is building with building stones: there are blocks, pillars, slabs and beams. B

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[228] For a different take on Wittgenstein's use of Augustine and the 'shopping' example see Phil Hutchinson and Rupert Read's *Memento: A Philosophical Investigation*, to be found in Read, Rupert and Goodenough, Jerry (eds.) *Film as Philosophy: Essays in Cinema after Wittgenstein and Cavell*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005. Hutchinson and Read consider the understanding I present here as the 'standard interpretation in Wittgenstein scholarship at present.' (Ibid., p. 90.) They ask whether it is 'really a satisfying conclusion to write that the grocer example is an 'illustration of different types of words?' (Ibid., p. 74.). They offer a rather intricate understanding of the example.

[229] *An Analytical Commentary on Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations*, p. 24.

has to pass the stones, and that in the order in which A needs them. For this purpose they use a language consisting of the words of the words "block", "pillar", "slab", "beam". A calls them out;-B brings the stone which he has learnt to bring at such-and-such a call.—Conceive this as a complete primitive language.[230]

What Wittgenstein is concerned with is the view that 'the individual words in language name objects'. From this emerges the following: 'Every word has a meaning. This meaning is correlated with the word. It is the object for which the word stands.'[231] This *seems* to fit in with the builder's example ('slab' refers to a block of building material):

> That philosophical concept of meaning has its place in a primitive idea of the way language functions. But one can also say that it is the idea of a language more primitive than ours.[232]

Wittgenstein is saying that the Augustinian picture of language is more primitive than the language we actually use. Again, Augustine has not accounted for the use of language in culture. The point of all this might be considered somewhat simplistic, that words can be used in a wide variety of ways, beyond Augustine's primitive understanding. And indeed it is a *simple* point that he is making.[233]

According to Wittgenstein we can think of this, primitive, simple language as the whole language. Being the whole language, of course, means that children must learn how to speak it. They will come to understand what the word 'slab' represents, for example. The teacher might point to a slab, uttering the word 'slab', and the child will make a connection between a word and the piece of building material:

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[230] *Philosophical Investigations*, §2.
[231] Ibid., §1.
[232] Ibid., §2.
[233] What will be seen as the chapter progresses, is that many thinkers cannot accept the simple purposes of such language-games for what they are, and have responded to them in ways that would surely have exasperated Wittgenstein.

An important part of the training will consist in the teacher's pointing to the objects, directing the child's attention to them, and at the same time uttering a word; for instance, the word "slab" as he points to the shape.[234]

In this way, it is possible to 'establish an association between the word and the thing.' Wittgenstein then asks what this means, and gives us the following: 'one very likely thinks first of all that a picture of the object comes before the child's mind when it hears the word'; the word will eventually conjure a picture of the slab in the child's mind. But of course, is this enough for the example Wittgenstein gives (though it might be a language-game: 'And the processes of naming the stones and of repeating words after someone might also be called language-games...'[235]), for the child to be part of this example, to be a builder ('To repeat – naming something is like attaching a label to a thing. One can say that this is preparatory to the use of a word. But *what* is it preparation *for?*'[236])? If upon hearing the word 'slab' the child pictures a stone of a certain shape, does this mean he understands the word as it is used in Wittgenstein's example, has understood the simple language? It certainly isn't *enough* for Wittgenstein, that the child can do this (at least in this example). To say that this is enough would be to miss out on what is important here. Of course it is important (Augustine isn't *wrong*[237]); but this isn't what the words are for (It is imperative, for Wittgenstein, to understand the purpose of 'slab' in this example): 'is it the purpose of the word?- Yes, it *may* be the purpose.- I can imagine such a use.[...].But in the language of (2) it is *not* the purpose of the words to evoke images.' [238] What we have to look at is the *role* of the words, at least in the limited world of the example. ('Augustine's concep-

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[234] *Philosophical Investigations*, §6.
[235] *Philosophical Investigations*, §7.
[236] Ibid., §26.
[237] It is important to acknowledge this.
[238] Ibid., §6.

tion of language is like such an over-simple conception of the script.'[239]) As Marie McGinn writes,

> The function of the words of this language is given only with its embedding in the activity of building, and it is only by mastering this function – i.e. by mastering the use of words within this activity – that the pupil fulfils our ordinary criteria for understanding the language.[240]

When A utters the word 'slab' B fetches it for him. He has learnt to do this at the call of A. He has mastered this limited language. The child learns the word in the context of the building; it is embedded into this culture. Thus such language-games (are supposed to) show us that words, language, are very much part of a broad activity, the practice of a group of people, a culture. To understand language you have to understand that it is a part of the lives of those who speak it:

> Imagine a language-game in which A asks and B reports the number of slabs or blocks in a pile, or the colours and shapes of the building-stones that are stacked in such-and-such a place.-Such a report might run: "Five slabs". Now what is the difference between the report or statement "five slabs" and the order "Five slabs!"?-Well, it is the part which uttering these words plays in the language-game. [241]

In the above example, we are shown how the same words can be used very differently, have different roles in two different language-games. The builder, in Wittgenstein's original example, would not utter the number of slabs to his assistant (as a statement of fact), as that would be a *different* language-game, it might, for example, be the language-game of asking and reporting in which such use of words makes sense.

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[239] Ibid., §4.
[240] *Wittgenstein and the Philosophical Investigations*, p. 43.
[241] *Philosophical Investigations*, §21.

So, by looking carefully at what happens within a language-game, by paying attention to how it works, we will be able to see how words are used and come to a certain lucidity in understanding. One should not separate words from their use, forget that language is inextricably linked to practice, activity, behaviour. From Wittgenstein: 'For a *large* class of cases-though not for all-in which we employ the word "meaning" it can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is its use in the language.'[242] (Again, the same words, 'five slabs' can have different uses in different language-games) To understand the meaning of a word one has to look at the context in which it is used.[243] The following is from George Pitcher:

> ...philosophical perplexity arises when philosophers treat words as if they had no essential relationship to any modes of activity, to any kinds of situation in which they are normally used-when they treat them, in short, abstractly.[244]

It is prejudice, thinking gone askew, that leads philosophers astray. For Wittgensteinians it is such ways of thinking that lead to confusions when considering how the word 'God' is used by those who are religious believers. One should not see it as something that can be isolated, abstracted from the lives of those who use it. Indeed, Rush Rhees thought that one 'could not give any account of the phrase 'the existence of God', nor have any understanding of it, without considering the relation of God to human life.'[245]

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[242] Ibid., §43.
[243] John Perry puts it another way: 'The important point is that it is only because the words have a use in a web of activities-the orders given by the builder and the executions of those orders by the assistant-that the words have these meanings.' (Perry, John. 'Davidson's sentences and Wittgenstein's Builders'. *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*. Vol. 68, No. 2 (November 1994), p. 27.)
[244] *The Philosophy of Wittgenstein*, p. 245.
[245] *Rush Rhees on Religion and Philosophy*, p. 20.

One must remember that the simple language-games are not used for *explaining* what language is. The point that is made here is an illustrative one, rather than having theoretical or systematic aims:

> Our clear and simple language-games are not preparatory studies for a future regularization of language.[...].The language-games are rather set up as *objects of comparison* which are meant to throw light on the facts of our language...[246]

They are used for clarification, to illustrate, through simplification, how language works. But do they clarify?

Wittgenstein aimed for lucidity, and the points he was making were meant to be *simple points*. (This, as shall be made clear, appears to have been ignored, even by Wittgensteinians, so it is necessary to emphasise it) It is important, then, before proceeding, to highlight a danger always present for philosophers looking at his work, that is overcomplicating what, for Wittgenstein, *was* a simple matter; he was making simple points, highlighting features of our language; but what has followed often seems to have made things more difficult to understand (frequently in the attempt to clarify Wittgenstein's imprecise use of language). It has led philosophers to distinguish between language-games that are, for example, what Max Black calls 'primitive' and 'sophisticated', and what George Pitcher considers 'pure' and 'impure': 'Words can be divided into two classes: a) those which have uses in impure-language-games, and b) those which have uses only in pure-language-games.'[247] Cyril Barrett, too, wants to distinguish between language-games. He wants to distinguish between 'language-games within the structure of a language, and games that are played by the

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[246] *Philosophical Investigations*, §130.
[247] Pitcher, George. *The Philosophy of Wittgenstein*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1964, p. 247.

way in which language is used.'[248] It is hard to understand what he is saying here. I don't think one can make the distinction between language-games *within* the structure of language and those played 'by the way language is used'. But he calls the former 'syntactical', the latter 'cultural'. Syntactical language games 'play their part' within cultural language-games. (We can surmise that a cultural language-game is that 'found in the context of the form of life in which it is played.') The latter, suggests Barrett, 'have an aim and purpose other than that of language as such',[249] though this doesn't seem clear to me, how one language-game may contain another, how a syntactical language-game can 'exist' within a cultural language-game.[250] Such attempts to distinguish between language-games can lead not to clarity but confusion. Clearly some language-games are going to be simpler than others; the roles they play in life are going to be more or less direct or subtle. The examples Wittgenstein gives are *intended* to be simple, we have to elaborate and apply them to examples within everyday life. But, as we shall see, this is not how some thinkers see the matter.

It seems, to many commentators, that Wittgenstein considers language use in the builders' example to be very close to the play in 'games' as we ordinarily understand the term (rather than being *similar* in some respects, as one would *expect* from an analogy). This from PI 7 is quite explicit:

> We can also think of the whole process of using words in (2) as one of those games by means of which Children learn their native language. I will call these games "language-games" and will sometimes speak of a primitive language as a language-game. And the processes of naming the stones and of repeating words after someone might also be called language-games. Think of much of the use of words in games like ring-a-ring-a-roses. I shall also call the

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[248] Barrett, Cyril. *Wittgenstein on Ethics and Religious Belief.* Oxford: Blackwell, 1991, p. 116.
[249] Ibid., p. 116.
[250] Barrett seems to be confused here. What we can say is that *language* contains a multiplicity of language-games, as shown in Wittgenstein's examples given in the *Investigations*. The builder's example is a simple language-game.

whole, consisting of language and the actions into which it is woven, the "language-game". [251]

It might not be too fantastical to suggest that his linking of language with games might *encourage* talk of language as a game, to tempt philosophers to look at how close language is to a game:

> They are more or less akin to what in ordinary language we call games. Children are taught their native language by means of such games, and here they even have the entertaining character of games. We are not, however, regarding the language games which we describe as incomplete parts of a language but as languages complete in themselves, as complete systems of human communication. [252]

It certainly hasn't been seen as *mere* analogy by critics. (And this, as we shall see, has led to much unnecessary controversy, that could have been avoided had commentators accepted it as an *analogy*, and a simple one at that) Rush Rhees, for example, has taken the matter more seriously than others; his approach will be examined later, but first I want to look at the relation between language-games and actual games, for this has been the cause of some concern for thinkers, when they attempt to determine the success of Wittgenstein's language-games.

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[251] *Philosophical Investigations*, §7.
[252] *The Blue and Brown Books*, p. 88.

If *we* are not to over complicate matters here, and in order to further draw out, to clarify the importance of language-games (and what is important here about *language*), we should, at least briefly (and cautiously), investigate the similarities between them and what we ordinarily understand games to be. According to Norman Malcolm, Wittgenstein's inspiration for the notion of language-games came about from witnessing a game of football:

> One day when Wittgenstein was passing a field where a football game was in progress the thought first struck him that in *language* we play *games* with *words*. A central idea of his philosophy, the notion of a 'language-game', apparently had its genesis in this incident.[253]

Crucially, for Wittgenstein, the words used in a language-game are like (or perhaps more accurately, can be compared to) pieces in chess. The meaning, importance of the words can be determined by the role they play there (rather than *merely* referring to objects, which is simply one aspect of their *use*): 'When one shews someone the king in chess and says: "This is the king", this does not tell him the use of this piece.'[254] The meaning of a word is in its use. We can understand the meaning of words by looking to their use in the language-games, just as we can understand what a piece in chess is for by its role in the game. We must pay attention to the surroundings of the words, the practices to which they belong. To ignore these is to risk misunderstanding (as we have seen in the previous chapter). Wittgenstein is right to say that pointing out that a piece in a game of chess is the king is not to tell of its use. The problem some have with this is to be found in comparing words to pieces in chess, or the idea that

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[253] *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir*, p. 68.
[254] *Philosophical Investigations*, §31.

'we play games with words.' What the perceived difficulty comes down to here is whether we do actually play games with words (or what it *is* to play games with words). Rush Rhees is one of those who treats the example as if it were something more than analogy. He is worth investigating as he touches upon important issues:

> If I describe the game of chess and what we do with various pieces in it, you know what a chess man is. But we do not *say* anything with the chess pieces. And that is why it is not a language game nor even much like one.[...]. 'A game we play with chess pieces' – 'a game we play with words or with remarks': we might think of something like a student debate. But in the *Investigations*, in the example of the builders, for instance, he describes an activity in which two men are engaged...[255]

A little earlier is the following comment:

> It was because you play a game with other people that Wittgenstein took it as an analogy with speaking. It is not easy to see how far one is meant to take the analogy. It does emphasize important matters such as the way in which a *rule* – its authority and office – depends on playing with other people. But it still leaves out the idea of telling one another things.[256]

We might suggest that Wittgenstein's Builders' example 'leaves out the idea of telling one another things' simply because he is using the analogy to illustrate particular issues of meaning. Wittgenstein is using it to illustrate the fact that there are certain things you can and cannot do with words, for example. Nevertheless, Rhees' difficulties with the analogy are worth investigating because they have certain implications for Phillips' understanding of language-games, and help clarify what is important to the Wittgensteinian. Rhees places importance on the fact that there are two *men* involved in the actions described in the builders' example:

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[255] Rhees, Rush. *Wittgenstein and the Possibility of Discourse.* Oxford: Blackwell, 2006, p. 155.
[256] Ibid., p. 154.

And yet I would say that when they are really speaking here, it is not like a game, and it is not like the operation of an organization, simply; though I agree that it comes pretty close to that. I want to say that if they are really speaking there, then we ought to consider it in relation to the idea of carrying on a conversation or discussion

And,

Wittgenstein's builders have to live, and they are not always building. If they do use a language in their building, they will use it in other things they do. That is what I suggest, anyway; and I do not mean just that it is highly likely they would. I mean that it would not be a language they were using in their building unless they did.[257]

His worry here revolves around what it is to understand something, what it is to talk of *language use* and engage in conversation. What is the difference between saying that the builder is simply uttering a noise, and *saying something*? The first builder *can't* simply be uttering something that the other builder reacts to as a dog reacts to his owners' 'fetch!'[258] Upon the command the dog will run for the stick, he has been trained to do that. But can he be said to understand the command as humans under-stand language? This is an interesting point: 'When I give the dog a signal, I do not tell him anything. When the builder says 'beam!' he does tell the other something.'[259] The dog is not a participant in language. He cannot speak. You cannot play a lan-guage-game with the dog, for there are no rules, as we would ordinarily understand rules to be. 'If you say 'Basket!' the dog will go there. But he does not know he is go-ing to his basket; he does not know what a basket is.'[260] He cannot learn language, he cannot say anything and we cannot 'say' anything to him. The builders' example, however, is populated by humans. The builder understands what the word 'beam!' is,

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[257] Ibid., p. 105.
[258] The utterance 'fetch!' could, in fact, in this context, be any word or sound, so long as it gets the de-sired result.
[259] *Wittgenstein and the Possibility of Discourse*, p. 106.
[260] Ibid., p. 106.

he is told to do something. And because he understands, he could give the order too. He understands the word as a word in the language. He would understand different words that mean the same thing ('that long piece of wood'). But I don't want to get too far from the point here. Rhees sums up his difficulties as follows: 'There are analogies between language games and chess, but no one thinks you are speaking when you make a move in chess.'[261] We will return to this example towards the end of the chapter, for there is more to be said on the issues that can be raised here. But there are two obvious superficial similarities between games and language, or at least the *Wittgensteinian* understanding of language, that are intimately connected.

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[261] Ibid., p. 117.

Firstly, games have rules, and these rules define what the game is, what counts as a move within the game, what you can do and what you cannot do. When discussing *language* we might talk about what makes *sense* and what doesn't. There are, of course, right ways and wrong ways of doing things (as with a game, one cannot make any move one wants, do whatever one wants with words). The builder calls for a slab and the building is built. B, in responding to A in the right way, is following a rule. Secondly, Games are autonomous. What this means for Wittgenstein is that 'in the case of chess there is no temptation to think that it is essential to point outside to some object as the meaning' Similarly with language, one does not need to look outside the language-game (to an object) for the meaning, but rather to the use of words.

I want to concentrate on the use of the term 'autonomy' by Wittgenstein, which has, it seems, only added to the confusion surrounding language-games and Phillips' adoption of them in his philosophy of religion. I think that part of the problem can be located in how people understand the word. Dictionary definitions refer to 'self-government',[262] and suggest that to be autonomous is to be 'independent of others'.[263] It is a common reaction to Wittgenstein for commentators to closely associate his use of this concept with such understandings. Difficulties arise when people take this association too far, thus they think that, for the Wittgensteinian, language-games are *utterly* independent of others (and from the surrounding culture) and cannot, for example, be criticised from 'without' (that is from 'outside' the language-game). This, I hope to show, can be misleading and has unfortunate implications for the understand-

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[262] Macdonald, A. M. (ed.) *Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary*. Edinburgh: W & R Chambers, 1972, p. 87.
[263] Hanks, Patrick (ed.) *The Collins Concise Dictionary of the English Language*. London: Collins, 1988, p. 71.

ing of Phillips' use of language-games within the philosophy of religion (to be outside the religious language-game, can simply mean to be in a secular position). Again, this is a term that appears to have misled philosophers investigating Wittgenstein and his influence on Phillips. This is what Wittgenstein says:

> Why don't I call cookery rules arbitrary, and why am I tempted to call the rules of grammar arbitrary? Because 'cookery' is defined by its end, whereas 'speaking' is not. That is why the use of language is in a certain sense autonomous, as cooking and washing are not. You cook badly if you are guided in your cooking by rules other than the right ones; but if you follow other rules than those of chess you are *playing another game*; and if you follow grammatical rules other than such-and-such ones, that does not mean you say something wrong, no, you are speaking of something else.[264]

Importantly, the use of language, for Wittgenstein, is 'in a certain sense' autonomous. In another reference to the autonomy of language, Wittgenstein gives us the following:

> The analogies of language with chess are useful in that they illustrate the autonomy of language. Thus in the case of chess there is no temptation to think that it is essential to point outside to some object as the meaning[265]

So, what is Wittgenstein getting at here? In both examples, he is talking about *meaning*. In the first, 'if you follow other rules than those of chess you are *playing another game*; and if you follow grammatical rules other than such-and-such ones, that does not mean you say something wrong, no, you are speaking of something else.' We can say that if one follows the 'grammatical rules' to found within scientific inquiry, and then applies them to religious statements, without appreciating the context or the role of the words used in religious statements, one is likely to misunderstand them. And in

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[264] *Zettel*, §320.
[265] *A Companion to Wittgenstein's "Philosophical Investigations"*, p. 69.

the second example I give he writes that 'The analogies of language with chess are useful in that they illustrate the autonomy of language.' Wittgenstein is talking about the meaning, the sense of what is said, which depends on how words are used, their context. The game of draughts has different rules from chess (you can't play draughts with the rules of chess; the moves made in chess would not make sense in draughts), while the language-games that make up science, 'forming and testing a hypothesis',[266] for example, are different from those of religion, of religious statements. As we shall see in a later chapter, Phillips writes: 'When religious beliefs are torn from their scriptural contexts they become statements of fact, theories, hypotheses, metaphysical theses.'[267] The language-games within science and religion are played with different 'rules'. To see beliefs, for example, as mistaken hypotheses, can be, for Phillips, to see something that isn't genuinely religious.[268] One should not look to science for the meaning of religious statements. As Phillips points out, however, for some religious beliefs talk of evidence is appropriate: 'Of course, where certain religious beliefs are concerned – for example, belief in the authenticity of a holy relic – grounds and evidence for belief are relevant.'[269] We might criticise this example. Phillips' understanding of a *religious* belief, that is a *genuinely* religious belief, has nothing to do with evidence (Phillips was influenced by Wittgenstein's comment, when discussing belief in The Last Judgement, that 'The point is that if there were evidence, this would in fact destroy the whole business. Anything that I normally call evidence wouldn't in the slightest influence me.'[270]) What makes 'belief in the authenticity of a holy relic' a *religious* belief? Talk of a Last Judgement might lead one to ask what evidence there

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[266] *Philosophical Investigations*, §23.
[267] *Religion Without Explanation*, p. 184.
[268] I think that Phillips is being careless here in his use of the expression 'religious beliefs'. He frequently refers to religious beliefs as language-games. I do not think that this makes sense. I shall be examining this in the next chapter.
[269] *Faith and Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 86.
[270] *Lectures and Conversations*, p. 56.

is that this future event will take place. Different people might take more or less ambiguous positions on the matter, but the important point is that they 'are all playing the same game: they are expressing their belief, half-belief, or unbelief in a hypothesis. So this religious belief is taken to be a hypothesis.'[271] Wittgenstein uses his language-games to show that to understand what meaning a word has, we have to look at the contexts of use rather than some object that it refers to.

Critics of Phillips have assumed that there are certain implications of the view that language-games are autonomous (emphasising the notion of independence and self-regulation) for his approach to the philosophy of religion. John Hick in *Faith and the Philosophers* calls this the 'autonomous position'[272] and writes that

> The unacceptable feature of the position is that by treating religious language as autonomous – as a language-game with its own rules or a speech activity having meaning only within its own borders – it deprives religious statements of 'ontological' or 'metaphysical' significance.[273]

To see religious language 'as a language-game with its own rules or a speech activity having meaning only within its own borders' is to 'reduce' its significance. It is true that Wittgenstein sees language-games as having their own rules, but Hick is misunderstanding him in saying that they only have *meaning* within their own borders. Phillips has reacted forcefully to such a criticism. For him,

> if religious beliefs are isolated, self-sufficient language-games, it becomes difficult to explain why people *should* cherish religious beliefs in the way they do. On the view suggested, religious beliefs seem more like esoteric games, enjoyed by the initiates but of little significance outside the internal formalities of their activities.[274]

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[271] *Faith and Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 88.
[272] *Faith and the Philosophers*, p. 237.
[273] Ibid., p. 239.
[274] *Faith and Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 78.

It is perhaps unwise to use the word 'autonomous' when talking about religious language-games, for example, because of what it implies (*total* independence from external criteria) and I'm not sure whether it *has* ever been used to describe religious language-games by Wittgensteinians. Hick thinks that it has but gives no examples to support his claim.[275] In *God and the Universe of Faiths*, he claims that the 'Wittgensteinian philosopher' thinks that 'religious utterances constitute an autonomous language-game.' He goes on to say that 'This means that the realm of religious discourse has its own internal criteria determining what is properly to be said, or in other words what is true.'[276] Hick *is* correct to say that that 'internal criteria', that is grammar, determines what can be said (what it makes sense to say, as is the case with other areas of life), but it is the implications of this that worry some. Other moves, Phillips would say, are inappropriate for religious discourse. We cannot locate the meaning of statements by referring to an external object, but can understand them by looking to how they are used. If a philosopher suggests that religious utterances, for example, *are* autonomous, what are we to make of it? We will see in the next chapter some of the confusions that arise from this. Perhaps William P. Alston would be correct to think that Phillips' position is that religious utterances are merely concerned with expressing some attitude

> and that cannot be confirmed or disconfirmed, shown to be true or false...by anything outside the language-game, for the simple reason that it is not subject to those modes of assessment at all. If that is how the religious language-game is being conducted, its players stand in no danger of any interference

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[275] As does Kai Nielsen: 'It, that is, is a mistake, Wittgensteinian fideists claim, to use the distinctive criteria of any other mode of social life to challenge the criteria of significance of any one mode of social life are sui generic and this was what was meant by speaking of the autonomy of modes of social life or of forms of life. Does Phillips not, like Winch and Malcolm, accept that?'(*Wittgensteinian Fideism?*, p. 109.) Nielsen is expressing misunderstandings here, which will be dealt with in the following chapter.
[276] Hick, John. *God and the Universe of Faiths*. Oxford: Oneworld, 1993, p. 7.

from without.[...].This, then, is a way in which Phillips can purchase absolute epistemic autonomy for a religious language-game...[277]

Alston is reiterating a common enough criticism, that religious language-games cannot be defended or *criticised* from 'without', that believers are in no danger of having their beliefs disproven. And it is here that many might think that the analogy with games becomes unsustainable. (I shall deal with this in some detail in the next chapter) Before leaving the controversy surrounding the notion of autonomy, I want to look at a criticism by Max Black. He thinks that

> Ordinary games *are* autonomous, because they are intended to be self-contained and artificially bounded.[...].In order for the builder's game to be autonomous, in the way that chess is, it would have to be conceptually possible for that game to be played by persons who knew no other *language-games*.[...].Ascription of autonomy to the builder's game or to any language-game, however primitive, seems very implausible.[...].The common *Lebensform* of those who play the builder's game will include many other language-games.[278]

Wittgenstein, of course, would agree with the final sentence here; a form of life (*lebensform*) is, as we shall see in the following chapter, made up (in part) of a multiplicity of language-games, but it is absurd to suggest or imply that Wittgenstein *wants to* ascribe autonomy to language-games, as he would to a game proper. Black takes the analogy too far, and because of this misunderstands Wittgenstein. 'In order for the builder's game to be autonomous, in the way that chess is...' But who has said that this example is autonomous *in the way* that chess is? One *might* suggest that Wittgenstein is not being precise enough in his use of language here. What he does say is the following: 'The analogies of language with chess are useful in that they illustrate the

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[277] *Philosophy and the Grammar of Religious Belief*, p. 31.
[278] *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Critical Assessments*, p. 79.

autonomy of language.' Of course, he has not defined what he means by autonomy, and he has not fully explained to what extent it can be applied to language. Nevertheless it does seem to be clear what he is getting at. He is pointing to facts about language, and is using the game of chess to illustrate his point. He is not saying language is exactly like chess. But Black concludes that 'Ascription of autonomy to the builders' game or to any language-game, however primitive, seems very implausible...' I do think that Black is taking the analogy too far here, and yet this is a common view, for many *feel* that the builder's example is like an esoteric game, and that, more importantly, it does not do what Wittgenstein intended it to do. This has proved to be something of a distraction to philosophers, for we are not told anything about the builder's culture, for example. From Rhees:

> ...the activity of the builders does not give you an idea of a people with a definite sort of life. Do they have songs and dances and festivals, and do they have legends and stories?.[...].The description of them on the building site, if you add 'this may be all,' makes them look like marionettes.[279]

The builders' language-game does seem to be close to a game, it seems to be distant from what we would understand as a form of life, of culture, that as an example of a language-game, it is unhelpful.

> Language is something that can have a literature. This is where it is so different from chess. And if we include folk songs and stories, then literature is immensely important in almost any language: important for the ways in which things said in the language are understood. It has to do with the 'force' which one remark or another may have in that language, for instance.[280]

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[279] Rhees, Rush (ed.) *Discussions of Wittgenstein*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970, p. 83.
[280] Ibid., p. 83.

And we should recall something Wittgenstein said about the function of language-games: 'Here the term "language-*game*" is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the speaking of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life.'[281] Many of the complaints concern the fact that the primitive examples have little *real* connection to life as it is lived. But the notion of language-games being 'autonomous' as used in Wittgensteinian examples need not prevent them from having contact with the world about us. Think of the language-games of art, for example.

> The way music speaks. Do not forget that a poem even though it is composed in the language of information is not used in the language-game of giving information.[282]

The above example might be crude, but Wittgenstein is here explicitly distinguishing between different language-games. A poem *might* have words that are also used in, for example, an unimaginatively written, but factually informative guide book. And the language-game of giving information (a description by a guide, for example), might use similar words but is unlikely to be considered poetic. The *criteria* of *meaning* are contained within the language-game. We don't judge a piece of literature by science or scientific methods (for we are playing different 'games') and *yet* the art would have no meaning if it wasn't part of a culture, a form of life. Its meaning is inextricably woven into the stream of life. This *must* be why Wittgenstein considers language to be 'in a certain sense' autonomous. In practical terms, there is a danger of misunderstanding if criteria for judging or understanding one language-game are applied to another. This will be seen if one views a poem as simply a source of 'information' (while a poem would have no importance if it wasn't, in some way, a part of

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[281] *Philosophical Investigations*, §23.
[282] *Zettel*, §160.

life. And the mere giving of information cannot have the same *kind* of importance that we find in poetry). The *logic* of a language-game is not to be found outside it; yet language-games do not exist in isolation, but are a part of, and contribute to, a form of life (which itself embraces multitudinous language-games). To understand the language of prayer, for example, we have to look at the context in which it is used. Failure to do this might lead to misunderstanding the nature of prayer. I will return to this issue, in some detail, in the following chapter where I discuss *Phillips'* language-games and form of life.

There can be no doubt that Wittgenstein's imaginary language-games are not supposed to be *the same* as the games we play in life. The builders are not playing a game, they are building; their work has an important place, one imagines, in their culture (it *is* their culture). Of course, arguing that language-games are similar to (or different from) ordinary games can only distract from the crucial change in thinking about language that Wittgenstein is asking of his readers, *from* the notion that a name refers to an object, *to* the meaning of a word being understood as its use. In the builders' example, the expression 'slab!' does *not* refer to a certain type of building material, but (in this example) is nothing more or less than an order. I don't think that this is a problem for Phillips (within his philosophical work), who doesn't press similarities with games, although it is a different matter for *other* philosophers who think that it is a real flaw in his approach. They *might* agree with Max Black:

> On the whole, I am inclined to think that "language-game", as used in Wittgenstein's later work, should be regarded as an idiosyncratic term of art derived from ordinary uses of, say, "game with words" by a deliberate extension of application.[283]

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[283] *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Critical Assessments*, p. 84.

Again, I think that many will be on Black's side, and yet I do not think that he is being fair to Wittgenstein here. I will return to this point later. But, nevertheless, I think it is important to offer a close examination of just how effective language-games are in drawing attention to the features of language that Wittgenstein wants us to recognise.

So, for some philosophers, the language-game examples that Wittgenstein use *seem* too fanciful, too stylised to have any real relation to life, *as examples*, bearing in mind the importance Wittgenstein places on them:

> It disperses the fog to study the phenomena of language in primitive kinds of application in which one can command a clear view of the aim and functioning of the words.[284]

One *might* point out that the language of the builders, for example, is simply pared down, and serves its purpose, for what it is. It has no other function beyond the requirements of the builders to build. This might be so (and I shall be coming back to this point), but the fact remains that many philosophers (including *Wittgensteinians*) have great difficulty accepting that the builders' example achieves what Wittgenstein wanted it to achieve. (Again, such problems relate to how close his simple examples *are* seen as being to games.)

Looking at the examples Wittgenstein gives of language-games, one might wonder why he used the term at all (we might wonder whether it was worth it considering the trouble it has caused, even for those who sympathise with him). Why might George Pitcher write the following: 'Wittgenstein's name for what I have called a speech activity is a 'language-game,' and I shall henceforth use that expression rather than 'speech activity.'?[285] Why *not* use 'speech activity'? Isn't that what a language-game is? Isn't the use of the expression 'language-game' simply off-putting, bearing in mind the role 'game' plays in our language and culture (and the difficulties expressed

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[284] *Philosophical Investigations*, §5.
[285] *The Philosophy of Wittgenstein*, p. 239.

in the reactions of commentators)? It *might* simply be an activity,[286] at least many language-games are (in part) 'speech activities', but what does the latter description do, *philosophically*? What does it tell us? Of course it tells us nothing or very little, while 'language-game' highlights certain aspects of language, draws our attention to certain facts about language, features of language use, though these might be limited: that there is a *certain* autonomy (which is crucial for the Wittgensteinian understanding of religious language), that the meaning of a word is in its use. Wittgenstein is pointing to (and pointing out) the formal features of language. From Henry Leroy Finch: 'If Wittgenstein were to speak merely of language-activities, the *formal* aspect of language, which is what interests him, would not come into evidence.'[287]

Of course, although some have taken Wittgenstein to be saying that language is played 'like' games, that language is *really* like a game, that the features of games can be found in language, great care is needed if one is not to overstate the likeness. It is unfortunate that many prominent Wittgensteinians *have* overstated the similarities, and having assumed that Wittgenstein is going beyond analogy see profound flaws in his thinking. Their philosophical work on the examples he gives reflects their feeling that there are fundamental problems that have not been adequately resolved. For Rhees,

> The trouble is not to imagine a people with a language of such a limited vocabulary. The trouble is to imagine that they spoke the language only to give these special orders on this job and otherwise never spoke at all. I do not think it would be speaking a language.[288]

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[286] In the following chapter I will be showing that, in *some* instances of its application by Phillips, the word 'activity' might be preferable.
[287] Finch, Henry Leroy. *Wittgenstein: The later Philosophy*. New Jersey: Humanities Press International, 1977, p. 77.
[288] *Discussions of Wittgenstein*, p. 76.

Commentators might grasp what Wittgenstein wants to do but feel that the examples he gives are *too* much like autonomous, esoteric games. In short, they are *too* simple. The children in the builders' example are being trained, taught the words 'slab', 'block' etc., and what to do when someone shouts out these words. The words appear to be part of what happens on the building site. And because of this they have an extraordinarily limited role. For the children to fully understand what these words mean here, simply seems to be able to react appropriately to their use.

> What they have learned are *signals* which cannot be used in any other way. In fact it seems as though Wittgenstein has described a *game* with building stones, and not the sort of thing people would do if they were actually building a house.[289]

Rhees claims that this example 'will not do what Wittgenstein wanted. It does not show how speaking is related to the lives people lead.' And, he suggests,

> there would not be any distinction between sense and nonsense.[...].Unless there were a difference between learning to move stones in the ways people always do, and learning what makes sense, then I do not think we could say they were learning to speak.[290]

It does appear to be the case that in this example the very simple use of words, in the form of orders, understanding this and acting upon them have no other function, no real connection to life, there is no illustration of how the words used and the reaction to them are woven into the lives, have any importance in the lives of those who play the language-game. As Norman Malcolm points out, 'Rhees is stressing the idea that

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[289] Ibid., p. 77.
[290] Ibid., p. 78.

uttering certain words within a particular routine is not *speaking* unless those words are used elsewhere.'[291] According to Rhees,

> If someone learns to speak, he does not just learn to make sentences and utter them. Nor can he merely have learned to react to orders. If that were all he ever did, I should not imagine that he could speak, and I should never ask him anything.[292]

If someone learns to speak, thinks Rhees, he is learning to communicate, to say things, to tell things to the person he is speaking to. 'And you cannot teach it him by putting him through the motions. Nor is it like learning a game.'[293] Techniques used to teach him might resemble games, we might use some technique to get him to say the right word in the right way. 'But it is not what we are trying to teach him.' For Rhees this is not teaching him to *speak*. He won't be able to communicate in anything like a full way; he won't be able to tell you things. And yet this is what Wittgenstein writes in the investigations:

> We could imagine that the language of (2) was the *whole* language of A and B; even the whole language of a tribe. The children are brought up to perform *these* actions, to use *these* words as they do so, and to react in *this* way to the words of others.[294]

But this, Rhees suggests, is not speaking. To perform actions, to 'use' the words, to react is not to *speak*.[295] One brings something to or learns something from conversa-

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[291] *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir*, p. 38.
[292] *Discussions of Wittgenstein*, p. 79.
[293] Ibid., p. 80.
[294] *Philosophical Investigations*, §6.
[295] John W. Cook points out the following: 'On the one hand, he presents his characters as saying things, making calculations, making purchases, and so on, and in this respect he has made them out to be like us in that they are Zombie-like creatures, while on the other hand, he has presented them as behaving in a senseless fashion, so that they are made out to resemble nothing so much as performing animals. It is this peculiar equivocation that constitutes his notion of a language game and leads him to say that a language-game is behaviour. In fact this is what the builder's assistant in the language-game in 2 of philosophical Investigations seems like-a circus animal. Wittgenstein tells us that his *only* rela-

tion. It is difficult to think of what one can bring to a game in this way. And the builder's example does seem like a game. Perhaps one can compare it to a simple computer game, used as a tool to teach children words. The computer controlled builder shouts 'slab!' and the player must find the slab and bring it to him. Norman Malcolm accepts much of what Rhees suggests. This game does appear to be autonomous, esoteric, cut off from life. And yet this, we might feel, *cannot* be all that Wittgenstein is saying. There is a great temptation to assume that there should be more to it. This is important for Phillips:

> The expressions used by the builders cannot have their meaning entirely within their job. We would not be able to grasp the meaning of expressions, see the bearing of one expression on another, appreciate why something can be said here but not there, unless expression were connected with contexts other than those in which we are using them now.[296]

One might be tempted to agree with Rhees and Phillips here, that if the utterances and reactions of the builders are cut off, have no connection with life outside the language-game, we are not really talking about life, but something that *is* like a game. If what Wittgenstein means by 'autonomy' and 'complete' is that one can play the language-games without knowledge of other games, without reference to that which is without, then there is a real problem, for this does not seem to fit in with what he writes elsewhere. What we have to ask is whether Wittgenstein *really* thinks that the builder's language-game is like an esoteric game cut off from the world, from culture. By saying that the primitive language here is the whole language of the tribe, Wittgenstein *appears* to be saying just this. As Norman Malcolm points out, the language-

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tion to words is that he 'brings the stone which he has learnt to bring at such-and-such a call'. Surely this is no different from a dog performing a circus routine.' Cook goes on to conclude that 'The upshot of all this is that we must simply give up the idea of a language-game as a bad job.' (*Wittgenstein and Religious Belief*, p. 441.)

[296] *Faith and Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 96.

game he offers does not seem to offer the chance of conversation, and yet he still thinks it could be the whole language of the tribe. How can there be no conversation in a language? 'If conversation is essential for speech or language, then Game (2) is not a language, and when a builder calls out the words for building stones he is not speaking.'[297] This *seems* to contradict what Wittgenstein says some pages later, that to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life (and I suggest in the following chapter that 'form of life' is, partly at least, cultural in nature).

The problem, then, for commentators, is that the example seems to ignore culture. What culture do these people have, what background to the language-game is there? The builders do appear to be marionettes, or lifeless automatons. Here is Malcolm's reply to such a view:

> In the Language-Game (2) there is nothing that *excludes* the possibility that those people will sometimes whistle or hum while they work, or nod at one another in good humour, or occasionally make cheerful dancing movements as they come and go. That their few words occur only in the work of building, and in teaching the words, does not in itself require that we picture them as behaving stolidly or mechanically[298]

What is important is that language-games are embedded *within* a form of life. To understand a word you have to look at the context in which it is used. It is worth noting that Phillips was very much affected by Rhees' comments on the builder's example, and he too acknowledged that *as an example* it is flawed. He gives a thoughtful response to it in *Wittgensteinian Fideism?*, a very different, less sympathetic view of the example than Malcolm's response to the criticisms.

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[297] *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir*, p. 39.
[298] Ibid., p. 41.

Rhees's objection is not to the limited vocabulary. He is denying that anything would be being said. It seems more like an automatic response to a signal. But, in fact, such an order would be given in the course of lived lives. That's what makes the giving and receiving of the order what they are. The order comes in the course of a day's work, work which itself has a place in people's lives; work to which people bring much that is not that work, and work which can be discussed, or reacted to, when it is over; work which stands in various relations to other aspects of life, a life which is part of a wider culture with its humour, art, music, social movements and so on. This is why Wittgenstein says that to imagine a language is to imagine a form of life. That is precisely what is hard to imagine within the parameters Wittgenstein gives to his builders. [299]

Thinking of Rhees' difficulties with Wittgenstein here and Malcolm's response, there is clearly tension between what we want Wittgenstein to say, what might be considered 'Wittgensteinian', and what he *is saying*. It appears that if what Wittgenstein means by 'autonomy' is that one can play the language-games without knowledge of other games, without reference to that which is without (that is completely independent from that surrounding them, and completely self-governing) then there is a real problem, for this does not seem to fit in with what he writes elsewhere. But what *exactly* was Wittgenstein trying to do with this example, and how close is its use to that of his later 'factual' examples of language-games (which are less controversial)? Perhaps it is the case that the language of the builders is simply pared down (in comparison to language used elsewhere), it serves its purpose, for what it is. It has no other function beyond the requirements of the builders to build. From Ernst Specht:

> But with respect to a very limited form of communication it achieves exactly the same as our ordinary language and therefore represents, in a very simplified form, a quite definite function of ordinary language.[300]

Commentators who worry about this are perhaps aligning this imaginary language-game with those that are very much a part of an existing form of life, or are even mis-

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[299] *Wittgensteinian Fideism?*, p. 86.
[300] *The Philosophy of Wittgenstein*, p. 43.

taking the language-game *for* the form of life. But again, the responses to Wittgenstein's example here highlight the difficulties of understanding 'religious language-games' as being cut off, isolated from life:

> If the orders and responses of the builders are cut off from everything outside the technique on the job, we seem to be talking about a game with building blocks, a system of responses to signs, rather than about the building of an actual house. Similarly, if we think of religious worship as cut off from everything outside the formalities of worship, it ceases to be worship and becomes an esoteric game.[301]

I think that Phillips, like Rhees and Malcolm, places too much importance on aspects of the example that Wittgenstein was not concerned about. But, as we shall see in the following chapter, the notion that language-games can be cut off from life *is* a profound worry for Phillips in his adoption of language-games within his philosophy of religion (he spent many years rejecting any suggestion that this is so). But I think one can say that the example does what it is supposed to do. The people are educated so as to recognise a stone. The word 'slab!' is uttered; they understand that this refers to a stone of a particular shape. At the call of the builder, B not only recognizes that the stone of this shape corresponds to the word, but picks it up and brings it to the builder. The word's function is in its use. It isn't enough for B to think of the pillar, for the meaning of the word is inextricably connected to the activity of building that is described here, *is* to be found in the activity of building. This is what Wittgenstein wants to show. He isn't trying to show how it is connected to something broader, because there is nothing broader in the example of the builders than the activity of building, and it is this activity to which the words are connected. And besides, the builders' ex-

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[301] *Faith and Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 96.

ample shows us words within something of a culture where they belong: the building of a house.

I think that the builders' example *is* an effective one, but the very *difficulties* Rhees has with it do help clarify for us what *is* important here: that to see words being used in abstract from their surroundings is to not to see a language at all. If we are to appreciate religious utterances, statements for what they are, then we must take notice of their surroundings, we must listen to what the believers say, and pay attention to the contexts in which they say such things. This is, of course, to pay attention to the *depth grammar* of what is said. We can't, however, deny that there are difficulties associated with Wittgenstein's discussion of language-games. And there is the further difficulty for Phillips that Wittgenstein does not discuss language-games when he talks about religion, apart from the vague, perfunctory mention of prayer.

Wittgenstein, in the examples he gives of language-games, has been accused of offering something like esoteric games; one *might* suggest that the examples Wittgenstein gives are *not* particularly easy to appreciate, that they are too abstract. Phillips, on the other hand, in his writings on religious language-games, fleshes out Wittgenstein's thoughts in a way that illuminates his language-games, and places them firmly within life. I think he does well in clarifying their importance. And yet, almost every critic has misinterpreted what has been said by him. The following chapter, then, will look at Phillips' language-games and critic's interpretations of them. But there is a quite profound problem that I have only briefly alluded to in this chapter, and this concerns the *detail* of Phillips' religious language-games. What for example counts as a religious language-game, and are the examples that Phillips offers convincing, as examples?

Chapter 3

Phillips' Language-games and Forms of Life

Introduction

Part of what makes Phillips' approach to philosophy of religion difficult to accept, and difficult to *defend* is to be found in the language *Wittgenstein* uses. Expressions, employed by Wittgenstein to help remove misunderstandings or to clarify important features of language (and about which he was never particularly precise), such as 'description', 'grammar' and 'language-games', have been adopted by Phillips and used within the philosophy of religion, a subject area that Wittgenstein never directly referred to when using these terms.

I suggested that language-games have been the most difficult of Wittgenstein's concepts for critics to accept (or understand), and expressed sympathy for thinkers such as Ninian Smart, who claims of the term that 'Instead of serving any useful or enlightening purpose, it can only tend to confusion and obscurity.'[302] I began my investigation by distinguishing between 'imaginary' language-games which include his famous 'builders'' example, and those that might be considered 'factual', that include the following:

> Giving orders, and obeying them.[...].Constructing an object from a description.[...].Forming and testing a hypothesis.[...].Making a joke; telling it.[...].Asking, thanking, cursing, greeting, praying.[303]

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[302] *The Philosophy of Wittgenstein*, p. 47.
[303] *Philosophical Investigations*, §23.

The imaginary examples are used to illustrate facts about language. In the builders' example[304] we might think that the expression 'slab!' simply refers to a piece of building material. But in the example its role is as an *order* to fetch the stone. One should not separate words from their use, forget that language is inextricably linked to practice, activity. From Wittgenstein: 'For a *large* class of cases-though not for all-in which we employ the word "meaning" it can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is its use in the language.'[305]

The builders' example is a *simple* analogy, but some commentators have treated its role in Wittgenstein's discussions as *though* it is something more than this. They have assumed that Wittgenstein considers language use in the builders' example to be very close to the 'play' we find in games. I suggested, however, that its function is to bring to one's attention certain *similarities* between language and games, as one would *expect* from an analogy. The temptation to see the example as more than analogy has led to much unnecessary philosophising, that could have been avoided *had* commentators accepted it as a simple analogy.

Those commentators who don't accept that Wittgenstein is using mere analogy here have invariably struggled with his understanding and application of the term 'autonomy'. Wittgenstein claims that 'The analogies of language with chess are useful in that they illustrate the autonomy of language.'[306] Now, ordinarily, we might associate autonomy with such concepts as 'independence' and 'self-government'. A particularly common assumption made by commentators here is that this implies that reli-

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[304] 'Let us imagine a language for which the description by Augustine is right. The language is meant to serve for communication between a builder A and an assistant B. A is building with building stones: there are blocks, pillars, slabs and beams. B has to pass the stones, and that in the order in which A needs them. For this purpose they use a language consisting of the words of the words "block", "pillar", "slab", "beam". A calls them out;-B brings the stone which he has learnt to bring at such-and-such a call.—Conceive this as a complete primitive language.' (*Philosophical Investigations*, §2.)
[305] Ibid., §43.
[306] *A Companion to Wittgenstein's "Philosophical Investigations"*, p. 69.

gious language is cut off from (or independent of) other aspects of life. John Hick considers the Wittgensteinians to hold an 'autonomous position' in their approach to religious language, and that what makes this position unacceptable is that religious language is 'treated as a language-game with its own rules or a speech activity having meaning only within its own borders...'[307] Phillips has reacted strongly to such conclusions: 'Religious concepts...are not cut off from the common experiences of human life: joy and sorrow, hope and despair.'[308]

But there can be no doubt that many commentators (among them prominent Wittgensteinians) feel that Wittgenstein's examples of language-games are close to esoteric games, and that the building example simply doesn't do what Wittgenstein intended it to do. The difficulty many have with it has to do with what Wittgenstein said about the function of language-games: 'Here the term "language-*game*" is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the speaking of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life.'[309] The building example Wittgenstein uses appears to have little connection to 'life' as it is lived.[310] The words are used on the building site, and seem only suited for this use; they have an extraordinarily limited role (and make for limited interaction). For the children who would be learning this language, to understand these words simply seems to be able to react appropriately to their use. 'What they have learned are *signals* which cannot be used in any other way.' Rhees claims that this example 'will not do what Wittgenstein wanted. It does not show how speaking is related to the lives people lead.'[311] According to Malcolm, 'Rhees is stressing the idea that uttering certain words within a particular routine is not *speaking* unless those

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[307] *Faith and the Philosophers*, p. 239.
[308] *The Concept of Prayer*, p. 40.
[309] *Philosophical Investigations*, §23.
[310] We should be aware that Wittgenstein was talking about 'factual' language-games, those that occur in life, when he made this comment.
[311] *Discussions of Wittgenstein*, p. 77.

words are used elsewhere.'[312] If the words have no meaning in the world outside the language-game, then, for some thinkers, the language-game *is* like a game, and builders are not speaking. 'If conversation is essential for speech or language, then Game (2) is not a language, and when a builder calls out the words for building stones he is not speaking.'[313] I suggested, however, that the language of the builders is simply pared down and achieves what Wittgenstein wants it to achieve. It has no other function beyond the requirements of the builders to build, but illustrates Wittgenstein's concern that the meaning of a word is its use. The meaning of the word is inextricably connected to the activity of building that is described here, *is* to be found in the activity of building. But Rhees' difficulties with the example *are* important, for they illustrate the dangers of seeing language-games as being cut off from life, isolated from culture. To see words being used in abstract from their surroundings is to not to see a language at all. If we are to appreciate religious utterances, statements for what they are, then we must take notice of their surroundings, we must listen to what the believers say, and pay attention to the contexts in which they say such things.

This, as we shall see, is of great importance when we come to look at Phillips' understanding of language-games, perhaps the most controversial of expressions to be taken from Wittgenstein. The evidence for this can be seen in critics' reaction to Phillips' adoption of this term (and the vaguer, but related expression 'form of life') within his philosophy of religion. And what will become apparent is that most critics have *misunderstood* Phillips. But it will also become clear that Phillips himself is sometimes vague, that his application of the notion of the language-game to activities within religion lacks the kind of precision that one would wish for in such a contentious area of philosophy. By misunderstanding Phillips, critics have diverted attention

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[312] *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir*, p. 38.
[313] Ibid., p. 39.

away from certain profound problems that can be associated with his talk of 'religious' language-games. I will, therefore, spend much of this chapter attempting to clarify Phillips' understanding of language-games and form of life, and defending him against those who have misinterpreted him, and will address problems that *critics* have missed at the end of the chapter.

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In the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein writes the following: 'We remain unconscious of the prodigious diversity of all the everyday language-games because the clothing of our language makes everything alike.'[314] When he lists the various examples of what he calls language-games, he is drawing attention to the great many language-games, each of which has its own logic, but which might appear to be very similar (one might assume that talk of the efficacy of prayer should be taken as something that is testable, because it might, for example, use language that seems appropriate to the methods of science). Thus we can become bewitched by surface grammar, that is by 'what immediately impresses itself upon us about the use of a word'[315] when we should look to (or pay attention to) the depth grammar of what is being said, the way words are *actually* used within life. We should recall here that depth grammar shows us whether the surface grammar is something we can get along with philosophically. Wittgenstein wanted to show that language is a rule guided activity, and that confusion will arise when the rules of one language-game are applied to another. The notion of language-games helps to clarify that what makes sense in one context will not necessarily make sense in another. To see petitionary prayer, for example, as *simply* a phenomenon with an outcome that can be tested, as a similar 'use of language' to language-games found within the discipline of science, the testing of a hypothesis,[316] for example, will result in a very narrow understanding of prayer. A hypothesis *requires* the investigator to prove or disprove it. It is there to be tested; it serves a particular function. And an experiment follows a hypothesis (without a hy-

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[314] *Philosophical Investigations*, p. 224.
[315] Ibid., §664.
[316] 'Testing a hypothesis' is one of the language-games, along with prayer, that Wittgenstein identified in the *Investigations*.

pothesis there can be no experiment). It is a testable statement, which might be constructed following on from some observation. For Phillips such talk is out of place when one examines prayer, though we might construct a crude hypothesis based *around* prayer: 'If recovery from sickness is related to petitionary prayer, then having prayers for sick people will result in recovery.' (Or, we *might* agree that to pray to God is to have accepted any number of hypotheses) In the following chapter we will see examples of thinkers who have accepted that prayer is *something like* a hypothesis that can be tested, and have subjected it to the methods of science. But for now we shall be concentrating on Phillips' language-games and forms of life.

The following interpretation of Wittgenstein language-games was given by J.M. Webber in an introductory note to an undergraduate philosophy of religion module at Sheffield University:

> Wittgenstein: 'language-game' is an interwoven set of words and actions; to understand a word is to know how to use it within the language-game that it is a part of. In the case of religious language, the terms and discourse make little sense to outsiders. One has to share in the religious form of life in order to understand the way the various concepts function in their language-games.[…].Since criteria for the meaning of a term and the acceptability of its use are *internal* to the language-game itself, religious discourse cannot be critiqued or justified from the outside: 'criteria for meaning in religion must be intrinsic to religion itself' (D. Z. Phillips)[…].This view seems to leave religious belief totally impervious to criticism and unrelated to the rest of our knowledge…[317]

This quote highlights many of the misconceptions held by those philosophers of religion who discuss Wittgenstein's work and that of those who are influenced by him. Indeed, the Wittgensteinians have been the subject of much critical disdain, by those striving to explain, justify or dismiss religion. Most philosophers misinterpret Phillips, and dismiss him too easily, which makes it easier to defend him (but as we have seen

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[317] Housed at: *http://www.shef.ac.uk*

and will see, he is not *always* easy to defend). I wish, therefore, to illustrate this tendency to dismiss Wittgensteinian thought without paying enough attention to what is actually said, with some examples taken from prominent philosophers.

Phillips has had a vital role in fleshing out what Wittgenstein had to say of language-games. He emphasised that the importance of language-games lies in the connection between them and the contexts, activities in which they have their life. To miss this is to risk misinterpreting religion. And many philosophers *have* missed this, thus not only giving an incomplete and unsatisfactory portrayal of religion but also of Wittgenstein and those who have been influenced by his thinking. Thus Philosophers such as J. Webber accept that the Wittgensteinians have made the following claims: 'In the case of religious language, the terms and discourse make little sense to outsiders.' And 'Since criteria for the meaning of a term and the acceptability of its use are *internal* to the language-game itself, religious discourse cannot be critiqued or justified from the outside.' This kind of view is what is known as 'internalism', a term coined by Phillips himself, to characterise the position described above, which, according to Phillips,

> is a philosophical invention which has attracted a certain amount of attention in the philosophy of religion because it was *attributed* to certain philosophers and *not* because it was a view held by those philosophers.[318]

We shall see further examples of this accusation directed at Phillips as the chapter progresses. Again, what internalism amounts to is that the meaning of 'religious discourse' can only be understood by religious believers and that the truth of religious statements, for example, cannot therefore be assessed by those 'outside' religious traditions (by non-believers, for example). As it will become clear, neither Wittgenstein

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[318] *Belief, Change and Forms of Life*, p. 82.

nor Phillips have said anything of the sort. But to begin with there are two claims that I think can be correctly attributed to Phillips:

i) Within religion there are multitudinous language-games.

ii) The language-games that make up religion have their life in, emerge from and contribute to, a form of life.

Crucially, we cannot ignore context when discussing language-games. One cannot say, to give an example that Wittgenstein offers, that 'asking' is context independent. Asking God for something is different from asking a friend. One cannot say that what it is to ask for something does not vary with circumstance. Phillips, for example, thinks that to ask in prayer, 'is to come to a certain kind of understanding of those features of our lives which...occasion our desires.'[319] We do not need to agree with him here to see that this is why he suggests that one cannot first discover whether God exists and then examine the grammar of worship, that one cannot consider the reality of God, with any hope of real understanding, apart from the context of prayer and other religious activities. The implications of this (including the controversies) will be seen later.

While there are controversies and confusions attached to the notion of language-games and their association with religion, things are even less clear with 'form of life', for there are no examples given by Wittgenstein and he rarely discusses it in his writings. And yet along with language-games, we have here perhaps (for many philosophers) the most defining, most well-known area of Wittgensteinian philosophy. This is what Wittgenstein says of it in the *Philosophical Investigations*:

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[319] *Belief Change and Forms of Life*, p. 24.

i) '...to imagine a language is to imagine a form of life.' [320]

ii) 'Here the term "language-*game*" is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life.'[321]

iii) 'Can only those hope who can talk? Only those who have mastered the human language. That is to say that the phenomena of hope are modes of this complicated form of life.' [322]

iv) 'It is what human beings *say* that is true and false; and they agree in the *language* they use. That is not agreement in opinions but in form of life.' [323]

v) 'What has to be accepted, the given, is-so one could say-*forms of life*' [324](the plural is only used once by Wittgenstein)

Henry Le Roy Finch contends that there is no concept from this period of Wittgenstein's thought that 'is more difficult to understand and has given rise to more differences of interpretation that [sic] the concept of *forms of life*.' And while it is rarely mentioned and never defined by Wittgenstein, 'it is of fundamental importance...'[325] But how have philosophers interpreted it? Most seem to go for one of three interpretations, when discussing religion:

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[320] *Philosophical Investigations*, §19.
[321] Ibid., §23.
[322] Ibid., §174.
[323] Ibid., §241.
[324] Ibid., p. 226.
[325] Finch, Henry Leroy. *Wittgenstein: The Later Philosophy*. New Jersey: Humanities Press International, 1977, p. 89.

i) Form of life is an 'area' of (or practice within) life: religion, for example. (Science has also been considered a form of life).

ii) Form of life is 'contained' within a practice such as religion (prayer and ritual, for example).

iii) Form of life is broader than religion or the components that make up religion. It *encompasses* the activities, practices and understandings that include religion and its many components.

The first interpretation is often attributed to Phillips (by Alan Keightley, Patrick Sherry and Michael Martin, among many others), and, of the Wittgensteinians, is held by Norman Malcolm. The second is held by, for example, Patrick Sherry, who writes:

> It is possible that the term denotes something on a smaller scale, e.g. measuring, hoping or pitying...it is incorrect to label religion as a form of life; rather it includes several forms of life, e.g. worshipping, hoping and forgiving.[326]

While the third interpretation is offered by Hans-Johann Glock: 'Wittgenstein's term...stresses the intertwining of culture, world-view and language...'[327] This seems to be the closest to Wittgenstein, as, for example, there is an earlier version of his comment that 'to imagine a language is to imagine a form of life', found in *The Blue and Brown Books* which reads: 'Imagine a language (and that means again a culture)...'[328] Phillips thinks that

> no serious account can be given of religious belief that does not take note of the way in which it is interwoven with the surrounding features of human life.

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[326] Sherry, Patrick. *Religion, Truth and Language-Games*. London: Macmillan, 1977, p. 22.
[327] *A Wittgenstein Dictionary*, p. 124.
[328] *The Blue and Brown Books*, p. 134.

It is how a religious belief is acted out in this context which determines what kind of sense, if any, it may have. That is why the importance of Wittgenstein's remark 'To imagine a language is to imagine a form of life', cannot be overestimated. Becoming acquainted with a language is not simply mastering a vocabulary and rules of grammar. It is to know how things bear on one another in such a way as to make it possible to say certain things and see certain connections, but not others.[329]

For Phillips, form of life (in relation to religious belief) is something that encompasses 'the surrounding features of human life'; 'speaking a language' or language-games also contribute to, are part of, a form of life. Form of life is *made up* of language-games, though care is needed here, it is all too easy to lose one's way. I suggest that religion exists *within* a form of life, but it is not *just* a collection of language-games, and neither is form of life. Practices, ways of living, of seeing the world, activities, speaking and so on are all embraced by (or constitute) form of life (we might say that it is the general form of these practices and activities).

But what do philosophers say of Phillips concerning form of life and language-games? Typical is Michael Martin, presenting a confused view, in attacking 'Wittgensteinian fideism'[330] (It is often claimed that Norman Malcolm, Peter Winch and D. Z. Phillips are among its adherents, but it seems to be Phillips he is referring to here, for he is what Kai Nielsen, in his *Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* calls 'the arch-Wittgensteinian Fideist';[331] it is Nielsen who Martin appears to be following and it is Phillips who discusses in most depth form of life and language-games[332]). Martin

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[329] *Belief, Change and Forms of Life*, p. 79.
[330] 'On this view, it is a serious mistake for a philosopher of religion to impose some external standard of meaning on religious discourse, for such discourse is acceptable as it stands. According to Wittgensteinian fideism, the job of a philosopher of religion is not to evaluate the discourse of a form of life but to clarify its logic and to eliminate confusions caused by misusing the language of this form of life.' (Martin, Michael, *Atheism: A Philosophical Justification*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990, p. 46.)
[331] *Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, p. 56.
[332] Again, the phrase 'Wittgensteinian Fideism' was introduced by Kai Nielsen in 1967. Phillips has repeatedly denied holding views that are attributed to Wittgensteinian Fideists. There are five 'theses' that are supposed to be held by them: i) Religious beliefs are logically cut off from from human life. ii) Religious belief can only be understood by believers. iii) What is meaningful in religion is determined

writes, quite accurately (of Phillips), concerning the insistence on 'distinctiveness',[333] that for this view 'religious discourse is embedded in a form of life and has its own rules and logic'.[334] But he goes on to talk of 'the language-game of religion' and says that as 'religious discourse is a separate, unique language-game different from that of science', it is not empirically testable, and: 'In general, a philosopher's task is not to criticize a form of life or its language but to describe both...'[335]

It is the distinctiveness of language-games and 'forms of life' that he thinks is most controversial: 'the basis for distinguishing one form of life from another, one language-game from another, is unclear.' He claims that the Wittgensteinian fideists think that as *each* form of life 'is governed by its own standards, there should be no external criticism.'[336] Again, here is a philosopher attributing a view to Phillips, internalism, that none of the Wittgensteinians hold. And Martin appears to be confusing the notion of form of life with that of the language-game. For while a language-game might be 'governed by its own standards', I think that we cannot talk in the same way of form of life, which is, in part at least, *made up of* individual language-games. (It is clear that what Martin is talking about here are language-games) Now if this is really what Phillips is saying then Martin is right to find it absurd. But his confusion is well-illustrated by the examples he uses: '...consider the practices of astrology and fortunetelling, reading palms, tea leaves and so on. Do these constitute forms of life with

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solely by 'religious' language. iv) Religious beliefs are immune from criticism. v) Religious beliefs are immune from non-religious cultural or personal events. It will soon become apparent that Phillips does not hold any of these views. It is unlikely that *anybody* has actually held them.

[333] This notion is an important component of Phillips' discussion of religious language-games. He uses (indeed, he introduced it) it to show that language-games are separate from each other (though he does not claim that they are unrelated, or not connected in any way to each other). But of course, saying that language-games are distinctive has led to accusations of 'internalism'. Phillips is aware of this: 'religious beliefs seem more like esoteric games, enjoyed by the initiates but of little significance outside the internal formalities of their activities. Religious beliefs begin to look like hobbies – something with which men occupy themselves at week-ends.'(*Faith and Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 78.)

[334] *Atheism: A Philosophical Justification*, p. 256.

[335] Ibid., p. 256.

[336] Ibid., p. 257.

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their own language-games?'[337] Phillips has never said that such practices (or that any practices) *constitute* forms of life. Martin asks whether each religious or political group and its practice 'constitute a different form of life with its own language-game' (notice that he talks of a single language-game here) and whether for religion there is 'only one religious language-game, or are there many?'[338] (Again he is conflating language-games and form of life) And what about different religions? Where Buddhism is concerned, he thinks that Phillips would have to say that this is a different form of life with different language-games from Christianity. (Phillips *might* say that it exists or originated within a different form of life (that is India in the 5th century BC; the practices, activities, and thinking of that time and place) and, naturally, with language-games that are not part of the make-up of Christianity). But then what of differences within Christianity? Can't one say that different sects and denominations are different forms of life with different language-games? He goes on to claim that there are absurd consequences to be drawn from this, for it would surely mean that 'the same terms in different language-games would have different meanings'[339] that, for example, 'members of one Baptist sect would not be able to understand members of another Baptist sect.' And that there are sinister implications of such a way of thinking, for he suggests that

> since each form of life is governed by its own standards, there could be no external criticism.[...].Suppose that each political practice constitutes a separate form of life. If so, external criticism of a practice such as Nazism would be impossible.[340]

So the various *incompatible* claims made here are that:

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[337] Ibid., p. 257.
[338] Ibid., p. 257.
[339] Ibid., p. 257.
[340] Ibid., p. 257.

i) Religion as a whole is a language-game.

ii) Religion is a form of life.

iii) There might be one or more language-games for religion.

iv) Within religion there are many forms of life.

v) Each form of life is immune from external criticism.

vi) Terms used within one language-game cannot be understood in another.

To begin with it is worth clarifying whether Phillips actually makes any of the above claims.

i) He does not say that religion as a whole is a language-game, but he talks of language-*games*, of religious *beliefs* as language-games. There is of course, a multiplicity of beliefs within religion: belief in God, belief in prayer and so on. He writes of 'the language-games involved in religious beliefs.'[341] Remember, Martin asks whether, for religion, there is 'only one religious language-game, or are there many?' Brian Clack makes a similar mistake to Martin and many others: '...it has not been established that Wittgenstein intended to widen the scope of the concept of a language-game so as to include such large scale activities as 'science' or 'religion'.'[342] Of course, it has *not* been established that Wittgenstein intended to extend the concept, but nor does Phillips widen it. In *Religion without Explanation*, he refers to rituals as language-games and in *Faith and Philosophical Enquiry* he talks of 'religious beliefs as distinctive language-games.'[343] So it is important to emphasise that Phillips does not claim that religion itself, as a *whole*, is a distinctive language-game. Much better, then, to say

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[341] *Belief, Change and Forms of Life*, p. 19.
[342] Clack, Brian. *Wittgenstein, Frazer and Religion*. London: Macmillan Press, 1999, p. 31.
[343] *Faith and Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 78.

that religion involves multitudinous language-games (and we can think of various language-games within the Catholic Mass, for example. From the initial 'sign of the cross' to the Eucharistic prayer, Holy Communion, and the mixture of words and action involved in the 'sign of peace', there are numerous instances of what we might think of as language-games). The importance of this lies in the relation between the different language-games and the form of life in which they have their existence. 'Religion' is too broad a term; we need (as philosophers) to focus on the language-games, the words and actions that go towards the make up of religion, to examine these words and the actions into which they are woven, in their natural environment, if we are to see them for what they are.

ii) Religion is a form of life. Although this claim is regularly attributed to Phillips it is not what he claims at all. What Phillips suggests, in *Belief, Change and Forms of Life* is: 'What can be said is that it is impossible to imagine a religion without imagining it *in* a form of life.'[344] This seems to be a much broader conception of form of life than that adopted by most of his critics, who see religion as a form of life or even as including *different* forms of life, that is *language-games* such as praying, forgiving, worshipping.[345] But this is not how Wittgenstein conceives it to be. Hans-Johann Glock supports Phillips here. He writes:

> Our language-games are embedded in our form of life, the overall practices of a linguistic community. The fact remains that Wittgenstein never identified the notion of a language-game with that of a form of life.[346]

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[344] *Belief, Change and Forms of Life*, p. 79.
[345] Norman Malcolm sees pitying and comforting an injured man as being an example of a form of life, and he also considers religion and science as forms of life. 'Religion is a form of life. It is language embedded in action...science is another.' (Malcolm, Norman. *Knowledge and Certainty*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1975, p. 119.)
[346] *A Wittgenstein Dictionary*, p. 79.

Patrick Sherry makes the same mistake as Martin, thinking that worship is actually a

form of life: 'Presumably this 'form of life' has no point unless what is worshipped

actually exists.'[347] While he thinks that it is incorrect to call religion a form of life, he

does think that it denotes something narrower, that it 'denotes something on a smaller

scale.'[348] He asks, of the Wittgensteinians, for example: 'What is the relationship be-

tween the person of Jesus and the forms of life, language-games and other compo-

nents of the complex system of developed Christianity?'[349] So it is clear that Sherry

thinks forms of life *and* language-games make up religion. Now look at what Phillips

actually says here. He is quite explicit on this point:

> ...it is a misunderstanding to see religion *as* a form of life. What can be said is
> that it is impossible to imagine a religion without imagining it *in* a form of
> life.[350]

This, then, is crucial. For Phillips, 'form of life' is something much broader, a broader

context, within which religion gets its life. What *might* be described as the culture (if

one sees a culture as the broad form of practices, language, activities) of a population.

It would be impossible to imagine religious belief, in this view, apart from life, as it

emerges from and is reliant upon it. Only once is Phillips inconsistent. In *Faith and*

Philosophical Enquiry, he writes:

> So far from it being true that religious beliefs can be thought of as isolated
> language-games, cut off from all other forms of life, the fact is that religious
> beliefs cannot be understood at all unless their relation to other forms of life is
> taken into account.[351]

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[347] *Religion, Truth and Language-games*, p 61.
[348] Ibid., p. 221.
[349] Ibid., p. 45.
[350] *Belief, Change and Forms of Life*, p. 79.
[351] *Faith and Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 97.

This seems to contradict what Phillips writes of the matter in his subsequent work.

For example, from his paper *Searle on Language-Games and Religion*:

> I would not speak myself of 'the language game of religion'. Religious belief involves many language-games. Similarly, I would not speak of religion as a form of life, but as existing in a form of life.[352]

Also from the former book, '...if religious beliefs are isolated, self-sufficient language games...'[353] He is here suggesting that a religious *belief* is a language-game. Phillips writes more:

> If there is a relation between religion and culture, and if the religious element expresses what is spiritual, it is important to realise that the religious element is a *contribution* to the culture and not simply a reflection of it.[354]

But this is not how Fergus Kerr sees the matter. His understanding of form of life is problematic. He agrees with Phillips, that religion cannot be a form of life for this would be to misread Wittgenstein:

> The very idea that religion, or anything else on that grand scale, would count as a 'form of life' in Wittgenstein's sense, although it keeps cropping up, has to be excluded on textual grounds.[355]

Kerr seems to be dismissing the notion that form of life can be anything as broad or 'big' as religion, and yet I have been suggesting that it is something *broader* than religion, and thus crucial to the understanding of religious language-games ('What we say has its sense in the stream of life.'[356]). Without form of life religion would not

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[352] Phillips,D.Z. *Wittgenstein and Religion*. London: Macmillan, 1993, p. 31.
[353] *Faith and Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 78.
[354] Ibid., p. 78.
[355] *Theology after Wittgenstein*, p. 29.
[356] *Wittgensteinian Fideism?*, p. 291.

have its life. Kerr points to the quote, part of which is given above. Here is the full paragraph:

> It is easy to imagine a language consisting only of orders and reports in battle .-Or a language consisting only of questions and expressions for answering yes and no. And innumerable others.-And to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life.[357]

There *is* some contention as to what this actually means. For Kerr, it is suggesting something much narrower than religion or culture. Colin Lyas, on the other hand, sees things differently: 'If we wish to understand what a word means we have to see how it gets its sense from its use, from the activities of life that generate and sustain it.'[358] To understand language one must understand how it gets its 'life' from the form of life (that is the overall 'form' of all the activities and practices within life), in which it has its life. It easy to see that Peter Winch might hold this position: 'Criteria of logic are not a direct gift of God, but arise out of and are only intelligible in the context of, ways of living or modes of social life.'[359] Are 'ways of living' or 'modes of social life' to be equated with 'form of life'? If so, then he differs from Phillips,[360] for it follows that science or religion are each a form of life. Lyas accepts this without question: 'Winch says that the criteria of logic are peculiar to such forms of life as science and religion.'[361] He later writes, 'Winch says that what can be said in *any* form of life, be it religion, art or science...' But I think a distinction needs to be made between

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[357] *Philosophical Investigations*, §19.
[358] Lyas, Colin. *Peter Winch*. Teddington: Acumen, 1999, p. 73.
[359] Winch, Peter. *The Idea of a Social Science*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963, p. 100.
[360] This may not be strictly true. The vagueness of much of the talk surrounding form of life, makes it difficult to grasp Phillips' position. I do not think that we can equate 'way of life' with form of life, and I don't think Phillips would want to either. And yet, in his *Philosophy's Cool Place*, he writes the following: 'In his later work, Wittgenstein emphasized that to imagine a language is to imagine a form of life or a way of living...' (*Philosophy's Cool Place*, p. 50.), and 'What needs to be stressed in Wittgenstein, Rhees contends, is his insistence that to imagine a language is to imagine a form of life, a way of living, and the role of a world picture in our acting and thinking.' (Ibid., p. 65.) A way of living cannot be a form of life. It is surely to live in a certain way, to live a religious life, for example.
[361] *Peter Winch*, p. 78.

'modes of social life' and 'forms of life'. The assumption that they are both the same is misleading. 'Modes of social life', I would suggest, is a phrase that refers to something less broad than 'form of life'. A mode of social life might reasonably be religion. This is given support by Phillips. In *Faith and Philosophical Enquiry* he writes: 'What I am saying is that the importance of religion in people's lives cannot be understood simply by distinguishing between religion and other modes of social life.'[362] For Roger Trigg it is possible that 'form of life' means 'a community of those sharing the same concepts'[363] and 'Basic conceptual disagreement demonstrates a difference in 'forms of life'.'[364] While D.M. High in *Language, Persons and Beliefs* talks about the 'human form of life in Western culture.'[365] There does seem to be some support for this position (he is equating form of life, however vaguely, with culture); the crucial comment by Wittgenstein is as follows: 'Here the term 'language-game' is meant to bring into prominence the fact that *speaking* a language is part of an activity, or of a form of life.'[366] Marie McGinn suggests the following: 'Our form of life is everywhere shaped by the use of language...our form of life is fundamentally cultural in nature.' What is important here is the phrase '*our form of life*'. And the list of examples of language-games are, for her, what 'constitute our form of life...'[367] I think, however, that McGinn is not quite right here. Language-games do not *constitute* a form of life (and religion is not exclusively made up of language-games). Language-games can be found within that which constitutes a form of life: the various activities,

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[362] *Faith and Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 93.
[363] Trigg is misunderstanding Wittgenstein here. Form of life cannot be a 'community', there is no evidence for this in Wittgenstein. We *might* say that communities can exist within different forms of life. And this would distinguish one community from another, a community of Trappist monks in Belgium, from a community of Zen Buddhist monks in Japan, for example. Trigg writes that 'Basic conceptual disagreement demonstrates a difference in 'forms of life'.' But why should this be so? I can have a basic conceptual disagreement with a colleague, who might share an interest and experiences, who might culturally be from a similar background.
[364] Trigg, Roger. *Reason and Commitment*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1973, p. 65.
[365] High, Dallas M. *Language Persons and Belief*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1967, p. 100.
[366] *Philosophical Investigations*, §23.
[367] *Wittgenstein and the Philosophical Investigations*, p. 58.

practices that make up a 'life'. We can see form of life as pointing to the wider context, that we need to pay attention to in order to understand and appreciate the sense of words (and this might include 'culture').[368] It is the general form of the activities that *include* language-games. Contrast this with what Fergus Kerr suggests. For him, Wittgenstein's forms of life are 'very elementary patterns of social interaction.'[369] Giving and obeying orders, reporting an event, play-acting are all forms of life. 'To imagine a language is to imagine an activity such as commanding and obeying.'[370] Yet from McGinn, 'Learning our language, or coming to participate in our form of life, is essentially connected with acquiring mastery of countless kinds of language-game.'[371] But if a form of life is made up of countless language-games, as Marie McGinn suggests, what is religion? Again I think that 'mode of social life' is appropriate here, and it would fit in with Phillips' understanding.

v) It is worth emphasizing again that the fifth claim attributed to Phillips, that each 'form of life' (or language-game) is *immune from external criticism*, is absurd (we recall that Phillips labelled this view 'internalism'). Even the most superficial reading of Phillips will show that this simply is not so, yet Martin writes: 'Despite what the Wittgensteinian fideists say, external criticism is not only possible but essential.'[372] This is a *very* common understanding of Phillips; that since one cannot understand a 'language-game' or form of life if one is outside it, then there can be no criticism.

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[368] Of all the philosophers who discuss form of life, however, it is McGinn who is preferable. She does, earlier in the same passage give a more interesting characterisation than most: 'Language is essentially embedded in structured activities that constitute a 'form of life'. Almost all of the activities that human beings engage in are ones that are intrinsically connected with, or somehow grounded in, our use of language'; our form of life is everywhere shaped by the use of language, and it is this that I tried to capture earlier by saying that our form of life is fundamentally cultural in nature.' (Ibid., p. 58.) Of course, we cannot say that form of life *is* culture, we cannot pin it down quite so precisely.

[369] *Theology After Wittgenstein*, p. 30.

[370] These are what Phillips would call language-games.

[371] *Wittgenstein and the Philosophical Investigations*, p. 58.

[372] *Atheism: A Philosophical Justification*, p. 257.

And yet I have not found a Wittgensteinian who makes such a claim; neither does it appear in Wittgenstein's writings. It is difficult not to react with a certain exasperation at the repetition of such criticism. Wittgensteinians would certainly agree that 'external' (of course, this means 'outside' religion, from a secular position, but it is clumsy when used in this context) criticisms are *possible*. After all, they occur with some frequency. Phillips is clear and unambiguous on this point:

> Nonsense remains nonsense even if we associate God's name with it. So far from wanting to deny the possibility of subjecting anything called religious to criticism, I opposed philosophical moves which ran the danger of justifying nonsense.[373]

I think that we can say a little more than Phillips is inclined to offer when confronted with such criticism. We might say that, ultimately, all he wants to communicate is the notion that one should *understand* what is being said before one criticises it. Patrick Sherry writes that 'one's suspicions are aroused by the fact, granted certain assumptions, the positions are invulnerable and irrefutable; and, if this is so, they may well be vacuous.'[374] He claims that while Phillips acknowledges that 'mistakes and confusions can occur in religious discourse,' he insists that they can only be recognised from *within* religion because '...the criteria of meaningfulness cannot be found *outside* religion''[375] and later 'for we can only justify particular religious assertions using criteria of meaning and truth found *within* religion'.[376] Phillips does say some of these things, but he is being misunderstood. All Phillips means is that one has to look at the context, that it is the *criteria of meaningfulness* that is being talked about; this does not mean that one cannot criticise religion from without, but that the criteria of mean-

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[373] *Belief, Change and Forms of Life*, p. 13.
[374] *Religion, Truth and Language-games*, p. 36.
[375] Ibid., p. 27.
[376] Ibid., p. 29.

ingfulness are given by religious believers. 'I have argued that the criteria of the meaningfulness of religious concepts are to be found within religion itself, and that failure to observe this leads to misunderstanding.'[377] To understand what believers are talking about one has to look at the context, the use of the words. This leads us back to the notion of depth grammar, which is the *actual* use of words, the actual under-standings by believers. We need to look carefully at what is said; again, we need to understand it. And, of course, the depth grammar might lead one to see that what the believers are saying (or that their understanding) is nothing more than superstition (it must be emphasised that 'understanding' in this context is not a form of apologetics). What Phillips is showing here, for example, is that to understand what practitioners within different religious traditions mean when they talk of God, one has to look within these traditions: 'The criteria of what can sensibly be said of God are to be found *within* the religious tradition.'[378] As soon as there is religious discourse there is a theology which reflects what is and what isn't sensible to say within religion. But again, critics have consistently misunderstood Phillips. There are instances, however, when he does not help his cause. One of Phillips' most controversial comments con-cerns the ritual of child sacrifice. He claims that while he would condemn a neighbour who kills another neighbour's child, if he hears

> that some remote tribe practises child sacrifice, what then? I do not know what sacrifice means for the tribe in question. What would it mean to say I con-demned it when the 'it' refers to something I know nothing about? If I did condemn it, I would be condemning murder. But murder is not child sacri-fice.[379]

For Roger Trigg, this is

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[377] *The Concept of Prayer*, p. 12.
[378] *Faith and Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 4.
[379] Ibid., p. 237.

relativism with a vengeance. It suggests that nineteenth-century missionaries had no right to tell Fijians that cannibalism was wrong, on the grounds that no-one outside the society could possibly know how they regarded eating people.[...].Phillips' view is simply that no practice can be condemned from outside the culture of which it is part, no matter what the practice might involve. Only by joining the society (and presumably taking part in child sacrifice, or cannibalism) could one begin to understand.[380]

I do not think that this is what Phillips wants to say. The important sentence from Phillips here is 'I do not know what sacrifice means for the tribe in question.' He is professing ignorance, and so withholds judgement on the act. He does not say that one would have to take part in it, or join the tribe. It is simply that one should at least understand *before* judging, and I don't think that there is anything controversial about that.[381] Of course, critics might counter that it is possible, even easy, to understand the importance of this ritual and still find the idea of killing a child repulsive.

Importantly, for Phillips: 'Theology cannot impose criteria of meaningfulness on religion from without. Neither can philosophy.'[382] But this does not mean philosophy (or theology[383]) has to be uncritical. Of course philosophy has a role: 'Philosophical speculation may help to distinguish religion from superstition...'[384] (we shall see this in the following chapter) So, what a religious believer means by his religious statements depends on the traditions within which he exists. Phillips stresses that if the be-

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[380] *Reason and Commitment*, p. 23.

[381] I presume Phillips was influenced by Rush Rhees here: 'I would not say I was shocked by the practice of child sacrifice in a really living religion, say in some part of Africa. If I learnt that a group of people were practising child sacrifice in some house in London at the present day, this would be entirely - repeat: *entirely* – different. I would think that the African practice was terrible – or I might say something of the sort. But I should have a deep respect for it. And I should certainly not say that people from other lands ought to break it up. I am assuming that the practice of child sacrifice *means* something deep to the people whom take part in it; and, generally, to the victim. There was nothing of the sort, I take it, in the massacre at My Lai. For this reason we may say that this massacre was vicious savagery...' (*Rush Rhees on Religion and Philosophy*, p. 101.)

[382] *Faith and Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 7.

[383] As we have seen, however, Phillips appears to think that theology isn't critical *in the way* that he thinks philosophy is.

[384] Ibid., p. 11.

liever accepts that his prayers will have some result, that God will answer and, for example, safeguard the lives of fishermen out on stormy seas, then this is a *kind* of mistaken science and thus can be tested. It is a testable hypothesis. Activities such as these are 'brought under a system where theory, repeatability, explanatory force, etc., are important features...'[385] Here 'religion', that is a particular understanding of religion, *can* be criticised from 'without'. What one has to do when examining Phillips' work is to note the great importance he places on differentiating between religious belief and superstition. But how might one know what a superstitious belief is? If the congregation pray to a saint who is supposed to protect fishermen, and believe that this person who died some centuries before will 'hear' their prayers and, if he so chooses, act in a way that prevents the seas from capsizing the fishing boat, then prayer in such an instance can be seen as being 'a way of getting things done which competes with other ways of getting things done, and that the superiority of one way over the other could be settled experimentally.'[386] We will go into this in some detail in the following chapter. So, Phillips, at least, thinks that some 'religious' beliefs can be criticised from outside religion, that is from a scientific position (from 'within' science) if, for example, it can be shown that they are in the realm of 'mistaken science.'[387]

From this it can be seen that William P. Alston's famous criticism is rather confused. He writes of Phillips,

> He clearly thinks that traditional arguments for the existence of God and, on the other side, the argument from evil for atheism are irrelevant to the assessment of religious belief.[388]

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[385] Ibid., p. 102.
[386] Ibid., p. 103.
[387] I will criticise Phillips for this notion of 'mistaken science' in the following chapter.
[388] *Philosophy and the Grammar of Religious Belief*, p. 19.

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He too thinks that Phillips claims that 'Religious beliefs are held subject only to 'internal' criteria. It is only considerations 'within' the language-game that are relevant.'[389] But we have seen how he thinks philosophy can distinguish religion from superstition and how, if a believer locates God in the physical universe, then argument is relevant (one is mixing up language-games). And we can say that if one appreciates the 'depth grammar', if one has a clear understanding of what is said within 'religious discourse' one might still dismiss it all. A believer, for example, might have been a 'genuine' believer but for some reason feels that religion is no longer *for* him, and he might feel particularly strongly about it, criticizing the nature of various activities and practices that go to make it up. He might criticize certain, perhaps fundamental aspects of its theology, while at the same time understand them for what they are. They turn out to be offensive to him, incompatible with his worldview, so he rejects them. As I suggested earlier, one might fully appreciate the significance of child sacrifice, the contexts of its occurrence, the traditions within which it belongs, and attack it as abhorrent.

The above is, of course, linked to the final claim, *that terms used in one language-game cannot be understood in another.* It is hard to know what exactly Martin and others are saying here. It would be more accurate, perhaps, to say that expressions used in one language-game cannot be understood *in the same way* in another, though it would be better still to say that words are often used differently from one language-game to another. Of course, a scientist, as a non-believer, might understand only too well the meaning of certain religious statements and reject them as absurd.

All this is connected to the criticism that Phillips' religious language-games are esoteric games, with little profound connection to surrounding language-games, prac-

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389 Ibid., p. 19.

tices, customs. Right from the beginning Phillips has maintained that this is simply not so. From *The Concept of Prayer*: 'Religious concepts...are not technical concepts; they are not cut off from the common experiences of human life: joy and sorrow, hope and despair.'[390] This is of crucial importance, for one should remember that Wittgenstein said that a language-game 'is not closed by a frontier.'[391] Critics who think Phillips sees language-games as esoteric games are misinterpreting him, for as we have seen, religious practices are not mere games for Phillips, that have little to do with everyday life and practices. Boggle is a word game, not a language-game, that gives pleasure to those who play it, but with no real, profound connection to the world. While language-games are distinctive, one might suggest that 'many of the language-games we do play would not have the sense that they do were there not other language-games independent of them.'[392] What is meant here? Phillips emphasizes that language-games such as praying are crucially connected to other aspects of life. For example, prayers offered for the safety of fishermen and a bountiful catch, uttered before they set sail, simply would not exist if in that particular area of the world or culture there were no fisherman and no notion of what a good or bad catch is. The concept of a good catch, the practice of fishing, the dangers for the fisherman, are independent of the prayers, they are themselves distinctive. It is these, of course, that give the prayers their force, meaning and depth. Now, the prayers do not have meaning in themselves. If they did then it would be fair to compare them with esoteric games. And what is important here is the fact that, because of the connection religious language-games have with other language-games, with culture and human existence (form of life), they can be influenced, and die away even, because of what occurs 'outside' them. And yet critics of Phillips assume that he thinks a language-game can-

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[390] *The Concept of Prayer*, p. 40.
[391] *Philosophical Investigations*, §68.
[392] *Belief, Change and Forms of Life*, p. 26.

not be affected by external influence. But one only has to look at the history of religion to see that this isn't so. For example, where the prayer for the fishermen is concerned, the fish stocks might disappear or the men might move to other, less dangerous, more profitable employments. Thus prayers for the fishermen might disappear, or while remaining, play a less important role in the lives of believers. The number of believers might lessen; reasons, such as loss of belief, or temptations leading away from the church, might even lead to the disappearance of the language-games that contribute to the make up of religion. Such instances show that language-games cannot be little more than esoteric games and that they have crucial connections to the world; they cannot be located apart from forms of life and *yet* are distinctive, but without meaning in themselves, for if they had this, then they *would* be no more than games. Thus we can see why it is so important for Phillips and the followers of Wittgenstein to talk of religion as 'containing within' many different language-games, and which exists in a form of life. For the importance of religious belief, for example, would not be fully understood if one couldn't see how it related to other aspects of life and the world (other language-games). The fact remains that Wittgenstein did not say that language-games are immune from criticism, are esoteric or anything like it. And neither did those who were influenced by him.

I have in this chapter been defending Phillips' understanding of language-games. But while I have been rather *uncritical* here, I have only intended to defend Phillips against ill-informed attacks by other philosophers, and to highlight the misunderstandings that can arise from a superficial reading of his work with language-games and form of life in the philosophy of religion. But while philosophers might be mistaken in their *interpretations* of Phillips, this does not mean that his application of the term 'language-game' is philosophically unproblematic. I am not simply referring to the difficulties that philosophers have had with the implications of Phillips' understanding and application of the term. What I am concerned with is the usefulness of the term in the investigation of religious concepts. Does it, for example, clarify our understanding of prayer to consider it a language-game? This is an interesting question and one that is often ignored by critics.

While Wittgenstein *did* include prayer in his list of examples,[393] there are clear difficulties, or worries that *should* trouble the philosopher. These relate, philosophically, to what has been said in the last chapter, but also concern religious issues. We *might* think of the term as being rather awkwardly deployed at times. This is relevant when we look at religious practices. We might suggest that there is the danger of trivialising discourse and practices within religion. Language, after all, is *not* a game. And certain forms of language use are more distinctive, and more *serious* than others. And yet for me, the term 'language-game' *is* useful for the philosopher. For it not only highlights (or reminds us of) the dangers of mixing different areas of life, of judging them or thinking about them as though they concern the same thing, it also helps us to

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[393] *The Philosophical Investigations*, §23.

focus on issues (such as that of 'autonomy'), that can be slippery, and ill-defined. Much of the discussion surrounding language-games can help us to think about the areas within philosophy or religion that are troubling and often ignored by mainstream philosophers of religion. It allows one to focus on certain details, and acts as a warning when examining different areas of life, that things are not always as they seem to be; that we shouldn't always follow the surface grammar. So, as a tool it has value for philosophers.

Prayer's importance, however, lies elsewhere. 'Prayer' is not a philosophical notion; it is not, in itself, philosophically significant. It is a religious concept. But while of itself, in itself, it has *nothing* to do with philosophy, what is interesting, philosophically, are the confusions that can arise; how the language use can distract philosophers (and believers) is what is of concern. And the Wittgensteinian philosophical approach emphasises this. But because prayer is a world away from philosophy, with its deep significance *within* the lives of believers, to talk of it as a language-game might seem a little disingenuous to the believer. I think there is an unavoidable tension here between philosophy and religion. To classify prayer as a language-game has philosophical uses, but there is a danger of being misled by the characterisation. We have seen that philosophers have misunderstood Phillips' writings on language-games. For believers the term might be even more misleading. They might feel, for example, that to talk of prayer in such a way is be to ignore what is important about the concept. I think it is useful, but we should be aware that in adopting it from Wittgenstein who didn't *really* think about it in a religious context, there will always be difficulties in making oneself understood, and convincing others that it is appropriate to talk about prayer in this way.

The above difficulties are minor compared with the *philosophical* difficulties of talk of prayer as a language-game. We must ask whether, philosophically, we can 'get along' with the idea of it being a language-game. I return to a quote from Rush Rhees:

> If I describe the game of chess and what we do with various pieces in it, you know what a chess man is. But we do not *say* anything with the chess pieces. And that is why it is not a language game nor even much like one.[...]. 'A game we play with chess pieces' – 'a game we play with words or with re-marks': we might think of something like a student debate. But in the *Investigations*, in the example of the builders, for instance, he describes an activity in which two men are engaged...[394]

We should be able to see the difficulty facing Phillips. In *The Concept of Prayer*, he writes the following:

> ...it is essential for the believer to assert that he talks to someone other than himself when he prays. A conviction that one is talking to oneself is the death of prayer. The question which the claim to be talking to someone in prayer raises is this: in what way does talking to God differ from talking to another human being?[395]

He goes on:

> At first sight it may seem that talking to God is a mere instance of our talk to each other, the only difference being that the person addressed is not on earth, but lives in heaven.[396]

We know that this view is unacceptable to Phillips:

> 'Certainly, when we when we call someone a person we seem to attribute to him the ability to talk to other persons .[...]. Persons are language-users. If we had no language, we could not be persons. In the use of this language, I commit myself to those who hear what I say.'[397]

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[394] *Wittgenstein and the Possibility of Discourse*, p. 155.
[395] *The Concept of Prayer*, p. 41.
[396] Ibid., p. 41.
[397] Ibid., p. 43.

Phillips goes on to suggest that God does not participate in language. Take, for example, the notion of anger, and the difference between 'I am angry' and 'God is angry'. For Phillips, 'We do not share the concept of divine anger with God in the way in which we share the concept of human anger with each other.'[398] It would be absurd to consider the two to be the same. Between two humans, the person who is speaking and the person who is listening share a language. This cannot be so between man and God. Phillips concludes that 'prayer is not a conversation'[399] And 'God does not participate *in* any language, but He *is* to be found in the language people learn when they come to learn about religion.'[400] Phillips writes that while speaking to a person, one can say those things to any person. People will respond, understand, learn something, perhaps. But for Phillips, talking to God is unique, since what is said can only be said to God. We ask, with Phillips,

> If God is not a participant in language, how can one *say* anything to God? How can one tell him anything? When we speak to other people, we often impart information. We tell them something, which otherwise, they would not have known.[401]

We cannot, on this view, tell God anything. He cannot learn from us. Prayer isn't conversation. 'The problem we are faced with is this: if God does not come to know anything, what is the believer doing when he talks to God?'[402]

> It was because you play a game with other people that Wittgenstein took it as an analogy with speaking. It is not easy to see how far one is meant to take the analogy. It does emphasise important matters such as they way in which a *rule* – its authority and office – depends on playing with other people.[403]

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[398] Ibid., p. 47.
[399] Ibid., p. 50.
[400] Ibid., p. 51.
[401] Ibid., p. 53.
[402] Ibid., p. 54.
[403] *Wittgenstein and the Possibility of Discourse*, p. 60.

The builders' example is a language-game because there are two men involved. But Phillips claims that God 'does not participate *in* any language' but is to be located within the religious language of people. What does this mean? The believer cannot tell God something that he doesn't know. God does not learn anything about the man who prays, at least in the sense that this might ordinarily be understood by humans. Talking of the builders: 'I am assuming that if these people speak the language, then they *both* speak it. Either of them could say what the other says. I think we imply that when we say that either of them knows what the word means.'[404] Phillips, who was profoundly influenced by Rhees, did not acknowledge this difficulty, but it is an interesting problem to raise, that is connected to other complications with his application of language-games to religion.

I hope I have highlighted an *important* (and overlooked) problem with the classification of prayer as a language-game. Again, what it comes down to is taking words from Wittgenstein and discussing them in a different context, accepting an aside made by Wittgenstein (who said nothing else about the matter in his entire career). But I think that it is important to acknowledge that we don't *have* to speak of language-games and prayer. It is not necessary, even, for philosophical investigations (and thinking about the critics' reactions that have been described in this chapter, it has not helped endear Phillips to other philosophers).

In conclusion, 'language-game' is a technical term that (in his application of it to religious practices) has obscured the important work Phillips has done in highlighting mistakes made by thinkers in their portrayals of religion. While philosophers might not pay close attention to what Phillips says, his use of language-games within his

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[404] Ibid., p. 109.

philosophy of religion is problematic. It is noticeable that he most frequently refers to religious belief as a language-game. It is not clear to me (and Phillips himself has not made it clear) how a religious *belief* is a language-game. I suggest that it would be better to talk of the language-games that are *associated* with religious beliefs, or those in which religious belief is expressed. For with whom is one speaking in subscribing to a religious belief? It might be better to talk of rituals, religious utterances or statements, perhaps. Phillips' emphasis on this can only be misleading.[405] He does admit that there are difficulties with the term, in his suggesting that religious beliefs are language-games. From his chapter, 'Religious beliefs and Language-Games' in *Faith and Philosophical Enquiry*: 'I write this chapter as one who has talked of religious beliefs as distinctive language-games, but also as one who has come to feel misgivings in some respects as having done so.' But what are these misgivings? 'Partly, they amount to a feeling that if religious beliefs are isolated, self-sufficient language-games, it becomes difficult to explain why people should cherish religious beliefs in the way they do.'[406] His worry is that religious beliefs might be seen as games, without importance 'outside the internal formalities of their activities.' And that there will be the suspicion that 'religious beliefs are being placed outside the reach of any possible criticism...' He does not, however, reflect critically on his *adoption* of the term 'language-game' from Wittgenstein and his attaching it to 'religious beliefs'. Critics too, seem to have ignored this difficulty. As we have seen in this chapter *their* worries revolve around the same issues that Phillips identifies here.

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[405] The sacrament of penance within Christianity might be a good example. We might see the act of confession as a language-game. One is confessing to (or communicating with) a person, a priest; there is a basic conversation, from the initial (informal) greeting, to the simple questions (such as asking the penitent the time of his last confession). The penitent is encouraged to confess, to acknowledge the mercy of God. And he tells the priest of his sins.

[406] *Faith and Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 78.

But wouldn't it be better and less problematic to talk of the *activity* of praying, for example? 'Language-game' *is* a technical term (as is 'form of life'); it has particular uses for Wittgenstein in his philosophical method. Phillips explores the importance of language-games within life, but it has been to the despair of commentators. Like Wittgenstein he is not precise about the meaning of the term, which makes it difficult for critics to fully understand what he is doing, but it also makes it difficult to accept, without ambivalence, the position he has adopted.

Chapter 4

Description and Superstition

Introduction

In this chapter I would like to examine an area of Phillips' philosophy often considered the most problematic. This is his understanding of 'superstition' and how he applies the term. The difficulties and contradictions that appear to surround his use of this word are connected to what is fundamental to Wittgensteinian philosophy: Wittgenstein's *explicit* advocacy of the 'descriptive method' in philosophy.[407] Even thinkers sympathetic to Phillips' approach will be aware of the potential for confusion here and should not be surprised by the exasperation expressed by those philosophers who simply cannot accept that philosophy, or the philosophical method advocated by Phillips, is *mere* description. This chapter will deal with the most controversial aspects of Wittgensteinian philosophy: the impression that despite their apparent commitment to 'description' Wittgenstein and Phillips both go 'beyond' it in their approach to religious belief, and the issues surrounding how Wittgenstein understands 'superstition'.

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[407] And we cannot deny that he is explicit here: 'We must do away with all *explanation*, and description alone must take its place. And this description gets its light, that is to say its purpose, from the philosophical problems.' (*Philosophical Investigations*, §109.) And, a little later: 'Philosophy may in no way interfere with the actual use of language; it can in the end only describe it.'(Ibid., §124.)

So far I have examined some problems associated with philosophical description. For example, there is the fear that the approach is 'conservative' *as* philosophy. For Marcuse, it 'abhors transgression' and shows 'academic sado-masochism, self-humiliation, and self-denunciation of the intellectual whose labor does not issue in scientific, technical or like achievements.'[408] I have suggested, however, that the Wittgensteinian approach is extraordinarily *active* and aims for a radical change in the way we think (it involves a different *kind* of intellectual labour, from that associated with science or technical achievements). As Wittgenstein says: 'The change is as decisive as, for example, that from the alchemical to the chemical way of thinking.' And once this change has occurred, 'the old problems vanish.'[409] Marcuse's interpretation of his position is a good example of how easily Wittgenstein is misunderstood. We must also acknowledge that there is an assumption that what Wittgenstein and Phillips *mean* when they talk of description is that philosophy actually leaves things as they are *once it has 'described' them*, despite Phillips' protests: 'To think that 'leaving everything where it is' refers to the *results* of Wittgenstein's method would lead to manifestly absurd conclusions.'[410] *(My italics)* Some might question whether a grammatical approach with the aim of clarification can have anything *important* to say about religion or *to* the philosophy of religion.[411] But of course, as John Whittaker points out, 'Such studies aim only at the understanding of religious conceptions *as*

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[408] *One Dimensional Man*, p. 173.
[409] *Culture and Value*, p. 48.
[410] *Religion and Friendly Fire*, p. 12.
[411] 'Are philosophy and religion...competitors in the same line of business? It is certainly a common perception that this is so. Undergraduates frequently come to philosophy seeking enlightenment on such subjects as "the nature of reality" and "the meaning of life", and there is no doubt that often, initially at least, they do hope to find in philosophy what, for one reason or another, they have failed to find in religion.' (Winch, Peter. 'What has Philosophy to Say to Religion?' *Faith and Philosophy*. Vol. 18, No. 4 (October 2002), p. 418.)

they are, not as one might wish them to be.'[412] So, we have examined the perceived problems associated with the idea that philosophy 'leaves everything as it is', and I have shown that even a superficial reading of the Wittgensteinian method reveals that it actually aims to *change* the way we think, while at the same time not advocating a particular position. But there is a further, more troubling, worry. Whittaker asks the following questions:

> When it comes to religion...can philosophy remain that neutral? Can philosophical discussions of religious ideas be framed as purely descriptive inquiries? Can they remain so aloof from theological issues that they contribute nothing of any religious value?[413]

Can Phillips remain 'neutral' in his investigations of religion?[414] Of course, by asking this question one is asking if Phillips can avoid taking sides or resist getting involved.[415] There is the fear that neither Wittgenstein nor Phillips stick to description but rather prescribe for believers and philosophers alike, not only what (they think) the nature of true religious belief should be, but also how (they think) philosophy

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[412] Whittaker, John H. 'Can a purely Grammatical Inquiry be Religiously Persuasive?' In *Philosophy and the Grammar of Religious Belief*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995, p. 348.

[413] Ibid., p. 348.

[414] Whittaker misunderstands Phillips here, and should have worded the question differently. He asks of philosophical discussions, whether 'they can remain so aloof from theological issues that they contribute nothing of any religious value?' Does Whittaker think philosophy should interfere with theological issues? Does he think philosophy can say something religious? We might agree with Peter Winch, who writes: 'In my view the most valuable contribution to our intellectual culture of the philosophical tradition (cultivated most explicitly in logic and epistemology) is sensitivity to, and techniques of clarifying, differences between different uses of language and the kind of argument and criticism appropriate to each.' (*Faith and Philosophy*, p. 415.)

[415] I think that the term 'neutral' used in this way is problematic. What does the word imply? One can certainly see why it is being used. The sense of impartiality, of being neither for nor against something (and this *does* capture something of Phillips: 'Philosophy is neither for nor against religion: 'it leaves everything as it is' (*The Concept of Prayer*, p. 10.)) But there is another sense we can get from the use of the term. A nation might remain neutral because it doesn't want to get involved in a war. Yet here we are talking about something that runs very deeply through culture, that is clearly of utmost importance to both Phillips and Wittgenstein. And Phillips does want to get something done; he wants to rid philosophy of illusions, of bad philosophy; he wants to get the bad philosophy out of religion. To say that he takes a neutral stance certainly implies passivity, when his philosophy is anything but passive. I think it is unfortunate that Phillips himself refers to this on occasion: 'Take neutrality away, however, and one takes away the contemplative character of philosophy at the same time.' (*D.Z. Phillips' Contemplative Philosophy of Religion*, p. 198.)

should treat religious belief.[416] It is not uncommon for commentators to conclude that Phillips is interfering in religion and religious discourse, that he is violating the fundamental Wittgensteinian 'principle' of *non*-interference.[417] Phillips does offer some clarification here, about what *he* is talking about: '...although it is not the purpose of philosophy to influence religious belief, undoubtedly, philosophical reflection does have such an influence.'[418] We have seen how this might be so, how, for example, one's beliefs (or one's understanding of these beliefs), can be transformed after reflection on one's understanding of religious concepts. But Phillips has not said enough, or has not been clear enough in his efforts to show just what his approach to philosophy amounts to, to prevent steady criticism from philosophers.

This criticism revolves around their understanding of 'description', and their understanding of what Phillips *actually* does. William P. Alston is typical:

> Phillips seems to me to be recommending revisions in the usual way of taking religious beliefs, rather than just reading off the character of one or another religious form of life as it actually exists.[419]

Brian Clack is firmer and more explicit than Alston:

> Phillips continues to rehearse the tired religion/superstition distinction which has been such a prominent (and yet radically unhelpful) feature of his writing

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[416] I think there is a real danger of misunderstanding philosophy's role here. If we look again at the last question offered by Whittaker: 'Can they remain so aloof from theological issues that they contribute nothing of any religious value?' We should ask what Whittaker means here by 'religious value'. Can philosophy say anything of 'religious value' to religion? Phillips thinks that philosophy can change the way a person thinks about *his* religious beliefs. He might come to see that they were mistaken. But this is not contributing anything specifically 'religious' to religion. In this sense philosophy doesn't do anything, in that it doesn't come down on one side or another, but instead shows flaws where they exist. This is following Wittgenstein: 'I ought to be no more than a mirror, in which my reader can see his own thinking with all its deformities so that, helped in this way, he can put it right' (*Culture and Value*, p.18.)

[417] 'Philosophy may in no way interfere with the actual use of language; it can in the end only describe it.' (*Philosophical Investigations*, §124.)

[418] *The Concept of Prayer*, p. 158.

[419] *Philosophy and the Grammar of Religious Belief*, p. 32.

on religion. He has faced sustained criticism concerning this distinction from a number of writers, who have convincingly argued that the designation of something as 'superstitious' is not descriptive, but rather pejorative and evaluative, part of a project of *reform*, of elaborating a pure, 'true' form of religion. Such a project patently sits uneasily with the avowedly descriptive nature of Wittgensteinian philosophy of religion.[420]

It is imperative that such criticism be addressed, for I think that Phillips *has* avoided

discussing it in any detail, at least to the satisfaction of his critics, *despite* his protests.

For example, Clack thinks that Phillips' project is a 'project of *reform*'. And yet, Phil-

lips is insistent:

> We are all reformers, brushing up religious language, so why can't I admit it? Reformers are people on the move-they want to get somewhere. For example, they tell us that we cannot say that God dwells on high any more. Apparently, space travel has made it impossible to speak like that. But I am not a reformer.[...].I am not reforming anything, and I am not going anywhere, but contemplating an old, old story and seeing what gets in the way of telling it today.[421]

We have to ascertain whether or not Phillips *can* be defended here or whether we

must concede that his project is, at the very least, *not* descriptive. And few would

deny that this worry that Phillips goes too far is most forcibly present when we come

to look at superstition; Clack goes on to write that

> Faced with very different perspectives on the nature of religious practice...the proper (and properly Wittgensteinian) approach would simply be to acknowledge and report those different perspectives, and not (as Phillips does) to adjudicate which are superstitious, shallow and repugnant, and which are deep, profound and true.[422]

I wish to begin by clearing up a misunderstanding in these criticisms. Alston thinks

Phillips' project should concern itself with nothing more than simply 'reading off the

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[420] *Ars Disputandi*, p. 2.
[421] *Philosophy's Cool Place*, p. 165.
[422] *Ars Disputandi*, p. 3.

character of one or another religious form of life as it actually exists', while Clack suggests that, when approaching the very different views to be found on religion, 'the proper (and properly Wittgensteinian) approach would simply be to acknowledge and report those different perspectives...' These two philosophers would oppose Phillips if he were *just* reporting differences! But to say that this is the 'proper' Wittgensteinian approach is terribly misleading; but this is not the only problem here, they are also offering a misleading picture of philosophical description.

Both Clack and Alston, I suggest, are missing the point of Wittgenstein's description. Of course, philosophy *simply* and unequivocally concerned with 'reading off the character' of religious statements, for example, would not be philosophy as we know it. What work is being done in simply *describing* as one would describe a pretty scene, a picture or an experience? Or, in the case of religion, simply reporting differences, or highlighting them? We can, however, appreciate why thinkers are misled. Wittgenstein *did* say the following: 'We must do away with all *explanation*, and description alone must take its place.' And, put another way: 'Philosophy simply puts everything before us, and neither explains nor deduces anything.' [423] And yet, as Phillips says: 'The point of the philosophical descriptive task...cannot be appreciated if its interest is thought to be in simply pointing out that there are different ways of living...' It appears to be a simple matter: 'By 'description', Wittgenstein means the elucidation of the place concepts occupy in our practices.' [424]

Perceptive philosophers, however, are, generally, left unsatisfied with such explanations. But can the critics of Wittgensteinianism be misunderstanding what Phillips has been saying for decades? As we have seen in the first chapter, in putting forward the notion that philosophy should be descriptive, and should leave everything as it is,

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[423] *Philosophical Investigations*, §126.
[424] *Wittgensteinian Fideism?*, p. 294.

Wittgenstein is drawing attention to the nature of the *investigation* rather than to what the investigation leads *to*. We have seen that this is an important elucidation to make when faced with those who characterise Wittgensteinian philosophy as conservative, who think that it actually leaves everything as it is *once* the investigation is complete. But it is equally important when faced with those who think that Phillips is a reformer in disguise. For example,

> it refers to the *character* of his enquiry. Wittgenstein is contrasting philosophy with science, in which one is constantly seeking new data to confirm one's hypotheses. If the data are not forthcoming, the investigation is on hold until they are obtained. In philosophy, by contrast, we always have everything we need. We seek clarity about what already confronts us. If what confronts us is superstition, that, too, is something to be clarified. But nothing is added to the superstitious practice in order to show this. It is simply compared, conceptually with other forms of activity...[425]

But the *conviction* that Phillips goes further than describing (that he is not leaving everything as it is) in his philosophical approach has real force, and cannot be dismissed as easily as the notion that the approach is philosophically conservative. We should recall the quote from Clack I gave earlier, that

> the designation of something as 'superstitious' is not descriptive, but rather pejorative and evaluative, part of a project of *reform*, of elaborating a pure, 'true' form of religion.[426]

Clack is speaking for many philosophers here. Before going on, it has to be said that Phillips *did*, cursorily at least, anticipate such criticism, even in his earliest work:

> No doubt some people will accuse me of *advocating* a certain kind of belief in God, and of proscribing some ways of thinking about God, and our relation-

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[425] *Religion and Friendly Fire*, p. 9.
[426] *Ars Disputandi*, p. 2.

ship to Him. This is a misunderstanding. True, I must have an idea of what genuine prayer is before I can give a philosophical account of it, but this is no arbitrary choice. My idea of what prayer is must be justified by showing how it takes account of the complex behaviour of religious believers in various situations. [427]

Phillips is not saying that he has reached his idea of what prayer is, for example, through philosophy: 'Philosophy does not provide a foundation for prayer, it leaves everything as it is, and tries to give an account of it.'[428] What he *is* saying is that his understanding of what it is must be subject to the same investigative method as any other person's notion of prayer or religious belief.

But many cannot take Phillips seriously, for no matter what Phillips has done to defend himself, it seems that many philosophers will not be persuaded that he is right. This is what Anthony Flew thinks:

> If we do take Phillips as meaning what he has here said, then as a contribution to the descriptive analysis of concepts within mainstream Christianity it is plainly preposterous.[429]

Again, there is the notion for Phillips that philosophy 'leaves everything as it is' and yet, at the same time, he seems to suggest, as Clack points out, that many beliefs are 'superstitious, shallow and repugnant' (although I don't think that Phillips would *ever* say that *beliefs* that might be confused or mistaken are repugnant. As we shall see, he *might* say a philosophical defence of such beliefs *is*).We might be tempted here to accuse Phillips of complacency,[430] and yet he was always aware of the difficulties he faced; that philosophers would not be persuaded by or responsive to, his way of ap-

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[427] *The Concept of Prayer*, p. 158.
[428] Ibid., p. 3.
[429] Flew, Anthony. Review of 'The Concept of Prayer' by D.Z. Phillips. *The Philosophical Quarterly*. Vol. 17, No. 66 (January 1967), p. 92.
[430] Phillips, in his published work, did not appear to be particularly worried about such criticisms of his approach and, considering the frequency with which critics attacked him in this way, he devoted very little time to defending himself on this point.

proaching philosophy of religion. For example, he talks of 'the enormous confidence of many philosophers in thinking that the meaninglessness of religious belief has been amply demonstrated,' and thinks that 'the difficulty of finding a receptive audience has to do with the price many philosophers would have to pay to have their confidence shaken.' Indeed, he goes on to suggest that

> this price has much to do with the anger and resentment which has greeted the conceptual reminders which Wittgenstein and others have presented; an anger and resentment rare, even in philosophy.[431]

The whole point of his method is to clear up confusion, and that is all he wants to do. Wittgenstein does *not* want to take things further, to tell people how to think, for this would be arrogant, as he suggests at the very end of the *Lectures on Religious Belief*:

> All I wished to characterize was the conventions he wishes to draw. If I wished to say anything more I was merely being philosophically arrogant.[432]

But how can we be sure that Wittgenstein isn't getting too involved? If we go back to Phillips' quote we can see how he wants to characterise the Wittgensteinian method.

> ...it refers to the *character* of his enquiry. Wittgenstein is contrasting philosophy with science.[...].We seek clarity about what already confronts us. If what confronts us is superstition, that, too, is something to be clarified. It is simply compared, conceptually with other forms of activity...[433]

But, while Phillips was keen to emphasise the clarificatory role of Wittgenstein's philosophy, there remain troubling instances within Wittgenstein's writings that appear to contradict this important aspect of his approach. What, for example, about the

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[431] *Faith after Foundationalism*, p. 310.
[432] Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief.* London: Basil Blackwell, 1966, p. 72.
[433] *Religion and Friendly Fire*, p. 9.

manner in which he treated the Catholic priest, Father O' Hara, in his brief, but infamous attack published in *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*? Many would not accept that Wittgenstein is here simply clarifying and comparing. In his *Lectures* Wittgenstein criticised O'Hara because he made his faith 'a question of Science'[434] He considers O'Hara to be 'ludicrous' and he goes on to say: 'I would definitely call O'Hara unreasonable. I would say, if this is religious belief, then it is all superstition', and 'I would say: here is a man who is cheating himself. You can say: this man is ridiculous because he believes, and bases it on weak reasons.'[435] By saying that O'Hara is being unreasonable, he is, many might think, not leaving things as they are, he is not *merely* describing the language use of a believer. He does appear to be taking a position and criticising a person who holds a different position. He is saying that O'Hara is mistaken to say what he does. What gives Wittgenstein the authority to judge a believer in this way? M. Jamie Ferreira, a sympathiser, sets this out with clarity:

> Wittgenstein's account of religion goes too far, by going beyond the description to which he should limit himself. On such a view, Wittgenstein's lectures on religious belief do not "reflect his commitment to description" because they include criticisms which are inconsistent with his commitment to description. For example, they contain a criticism of a (type of) believer (O'Hara) who appeals to rational justification for belief; this is taken by some to reveal that Wittgenstein's concern is "not to investigate the use of religious concepts among believers like O'Hara, but to propose his own theory of the logic of religious belief and to denounce other interpretations as 'mistaken' and as 'superstition'[436]

Is it possible to defend Wittgenstein here? One might suggest that he *is* doing more than *observing* the grammar of what this believer says: 'What seems to me ludicrous

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[434] *Lectures and Conversations*, p. 57.
[435] Ibid., p. 57.
[436] Ferreira, M. Jamie. 'Normativity and Reference in a Wittgensteinian Philosophy of Religion'. *Faith and Philosophy*. Vol. 18, No. 4 (October 2001), p. 447.

about O'Hara is his making appear to be reasonable' and 'I would definitely call

O'Hara unreasonable. I would say, if this is religious belief, then it's all superstition.'

He is, it might appear, making a judgement about O'Hara's belief. He is saying that it

is superstitious, and is, essentially, *wrong*. Phillips writes that 'My idea of what

prayer is must be justified by showing how it takes account of the complex behaviour

of religious believers in various situations.'[437] We might, for example, *suggest* that

Father O'Hara's position is not the norm within Christianity, that his views are not the

most common or are not even generally held within Christianity (among ordinary be-

lievers). Wittgenstein, we might say, is *comparing* what O'Hara is saying with what is

generally done within Christianity. Believers do not or tend not to talk of 'reason' in

connection with their beliefs.[438] By noting the practices of Christians, what descrip-

tion does is to show that Father O'Hara's norm, his appeal to rational justification,

simply isn't the *norm* for most believers, has no part in their religious lives. Ferreira

goes on to say of Wittgenstein:

> What he is doing is looking closely at religious beliefs and practices, at the
> grammar of these and picking out instances where an alien grammar *is* im-
> posed from the outside, sometimes by believers themselves. What Wittgen-
> stein is more likely doing, however, is describing a norm to which all religious
> believers hold, even O'Hara, and describing how O'Hara's behaviour belies
> his own claims to be treating religious belief in terms of rational justifica-
> tion.[439]

There is some evidence for this from Wittgenstein:

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[437] *The Concept of Prayer*, p. 158.
[438] So what do believers talk about here? 'A believer is asked to give an account of prayer. I do not mean that he is asked for a descriptive account, to recite the creeds, or to repeat the prayers he uses. What he is asked to do is to give a conceptual account of the kind of activity prayer is. Often, in the face of such a request, the believer is lost. It is not enough for him to say that praying is talking to God, adoring Him, confessing to Him, thanking Him and making requests to Him, since what the enquirer wants to know is what it means to do any of these things. While praying, the believer knows what he is doing, his prayer means a great deal to him. But when he is asked to give an account of prayer, to say what his prayer means to him, he no longer knows his way about. One is asking him for a non-religious account of a religious activity...' (*The Concept of Prayer*, p. 2.)
[439] *Faith and Philosophy*, p. 451.

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I think that what *believers* who have furnished such proofs have wanted to do is to give their 'belief' an intellectual analysis and foundation, although they themselves would never have come to believe as a result of such proofs.[440]

Wittgenstein, it might be said, is not interfering with religion, he is not imposing an interpretation on religion from outside religion, after all he criticised Father O'Hara for making that mistake. 'I would say: here is a man who is cheating himself. You can say: this man is ridiculous because he believes, and bases it on weak reasons.'[441] O'Hara wants to (and believes that he can) use 'reason' as a foundation for his belief, that is, according to Wittgenstein, unlikely to have any real relevance as to *why* (that is why he is a Christian, why Christianity occupies an important place in his life) he believes, that does not have its origins within religious culture; it is belied by his practice. Wittgenstein is not trying to impose a grammar from outside religion in his apparent ridiculing of Father O'Hara. He is, if the published notes are a true representation of what he said, merely trying to look at how O'Hara's words relate to religious culture and tradition. But this, we might suggest, is a peculiar way for Wittgenstein to go about illustrating what he means, it seems to be a contemptuous attack on views that are, after all, quite commonly held. We have to bear in mind not only what we have already discussed concerning grammar and the danger of being misled by language, but also the sometimes abrasive and contrary style of Wittgenstein:

Wittgenstein is not prescribing this grammar, but observing elements of it deeply embedded within the practice of religion. In some cases the grammar is analyzed in ways that might so shock some believers that they can only find Wittgenstein's account to be illegitimately prescriptive rather than descriptive.[442]

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[440]*Culture and Value*, p. 85.
[441] *Lectures and Conversations*, p. 59.
[442] *Faith and Philosophy*, p. 456.

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The real difficulty for those of us who sympathise with the Wittgensteinian approach is that even if *we* agree that Ferreira's defence of Wittgenstein, for example, has merit, I do not think that it will convince detractors. It is not difficult to identify why this is so. I suggest that it is, partly at least, the term 'description' that is at the root of such difficulties. We have observed that Wittgensteinian philosophy uses familiar terms (familiar within and without philosophy) to describe philosophy and its approach to religion, and have acknowledged that these can confuse matters.

The difficulty *I* have with the term 'description' is that it doesn't do justice to the amount of *philosophical* work that goes into the Wittgensteinian approach (and, of course, Wittgenstein did not explain its role in clear or precise terms). It tells the critic nothing of the thinking that goes into philosophy; it doesn't say anything of what makes the approach an important critical force within philosophy of religion. It simply says, to what seems to be the majority of critics, that this philosophical approach is not supposed to do anything (that it *isn't* important), is supposed to leave everything as it is, and then of course, when the approach is examined, it is full of examples of philosophy apparently *not* leaving everything as it is. The following is from Phillips:

> Its method claims to be descriptive, not prescriptive. That being so, whence the desire not to leave Christian philosophy where it is? Whence the desire to prescribe it out of existence? Is not this desire inconsistent with philosophy's descriptive task?[443]

And yet Phillips has never said that his work *leaves* everything as it is, in the sense that nothing is changed, that confused philosophy is left confused, that no work has been done. One only needs to skim any of Phillips' books to see that, like Wittgen-

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[443] *Religion and Friendly Fire*, p. 12.

stein, he is extraordinarily critical (on a wide range of issues), that his work is extraordinarily 'active', is always examining concepts, investigating the use of words to see if he can get along with such use, making his readers aware of the dangers of intellectual complacency. Like Wittgenstein, he is always on the lookout for bad philosophy, and is not afraid to say that it is bad philosophy.[444]

> A philosopher can hardly be expected to leave bad philosophy where it is. What Wittgenstein does not leave where it is are certain forms of rationalism and scientism, and the criticisms, justifications and explanations of religion emanating from them. What is to guide us in the rejection of these confused tendencies? Wittgenstein would say: what already lies before us, what we know when not philosophising.[445]

For some, however, the difficulties surrounding Phillips' understanding of description are insurmountable and render Phillips' attempts to apply the Wittgensteinian method to the philosophy of religion unworkable. Kai Nielsen agrees:

> We have a thoroughly naturalistic and secularist view, which is not a representation – let alone a perspicuous representation – or a description of the language-games of Judaism, Christianity or Islam. We have stipulation, not description here.[446]

But it is *what* he says in those instances when critics accuse him of going beyond description that I think is cause for most concern. This is intriguingly manifested in his understanding and application of the term 'superstition'. I think that Phillips *does* go beyond what we would ordinarily understand description to be, and indeed one could put a case forward that he goes further than his own understanding of description's

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[444] 'Philosophical theism views God as a metaphysical entity, construed as a being among beings. It is bad philosophy, partly because of its epistemological foundationalism, partly because of its meaning-essentialism, partly because of its scientism – letting one method elbow all others aside.' (*Wittgensteinian Fideism?*, p. 9.)
[445] *Belief, Change, and Forms of Life*, p. 41.
[446] *Wittgensteinian Fideism?*, p. 199.

role within philosophy; but I also feel that there is something *mistaken* in his under-

standing of superstition, which is more troubling and a rather different criticism.

The word 'superstition' should be used with care within the philosophy of religion, and yet it is tempting to think that Phillips does not pay enough attention to the various *significant* cultural contexts surrounding its use. I hope to make it clear why this is so. One might be inclined to say that *this* does appear to be a rather unwittgensteinian tendency in his work. But it is best to start with a dictionary definition of the term.

> False worship or religion; an ignorant and irrational belief in supernatural agency, omens, divination, sorcery, etc: a deep-rooted but unfounded general belief: a rite or practice proceeding from superstitious belief or fear.[447]

This is a widely accepted understanding of superstition and is the source of confusion, reflected in the use philosophers put the word to. Part of the problem (or indeed, the whole problem) is that 'superstition' comes down to the *same thing* for Wittgenstein, Phillips, James Frazer (who Wittgenstein famously attacks) and other thinkers. This needs clarification. Phillips' conception appears to have been profoundly influenced by Wittgenstein's few comments on the matter. Most notable is his famous statement from *Culture and Value*:

> Religious faith and superstition are quite different. One of them results from *fear* and is a sort of false science. The other is a trusting.[448]

Wittgenstein here distinguishes between 'faith'[449] and superstition, but also gives us two bits of information about how he understands the concept, that it comes from fear,

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[447] MacDonald, A.M. (ed.) *Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary*. London: W & R Chambers, 1972, p. 1356.
[448] *Culture and Value*, p. 72.

has its foundation in fear, and that it is a sort of false science. Of course, philosophically, to say it comes from fear doesn't tell us very much and we need to investigate further. But one thing we *can* say here is that this characterisation is not necessarily 'judgemental' (he is not judging it a mistake).

The next claim concerning superstition, however, most certainly *is*. What are we to make of the phrase 'a sort of false science'? There is a pejorative force behind this comment, but it also strikes me as being *wrong*. We cannot leave this issue alone, as Wittgensteinians have done in the past. We need to examine how superstition can be equated with 'false science'. Furthermore, Wittgenstein's two expressions, 'fear' and 'false science', used together in the same sentence is problematic, and by grasping why this is so we can look at superstition in a way that Phillips and others failed to do, that is philosophically interesting. I shall be investigating such issues in some detail towards the end of the chapter. But what Wittgenstein says shows something *conventional* in his understanding of superstition, and it is unfortunate that Phillips has followed him uncritically. Such expressions of hostility towards superstition have been common enough in discourse on the nature of religion. I will now look at an example of this.

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[449] What Wittgenstein and Phillips (and most other philosophers, it seems) tend to do, is to assume that 'faith' in a religious context, is the same as the expression 'religious belief'. It is here that the Wittgensteinians themselves, for example, might be seen to ignore other, deeper possibilities. Michael McGhee, on the other hand suggests that '...to 'believe in God' is to manifest the theological virtue of *faith*, that is, to have, on the one hand, confidence in God's word and, on the other, to be faithful to it...' 'faith' is embedded *within* the form of religious belief to which one gives one's assent.' (McGhee, Michael. 'Seeke True Religion. Oh Where?' *Ratio*. Vol. 19, 4 (November 2006), p. 468.) It is unfortunate, perhaps, that Wittgensteinians do not focus on the understanding of faith as something else entirely, apart from confused 'religious beliefs'. For example, Phillips wants to 'bring out the enormous contrast between what I take to be a true account of deep religious faith, and what I have ventured to call, the naturalistic fallacy in religion...I am not interested in mistaken religious beliefs, but in what I take to be genuine faith.' (*The Concept of Prayer*, p. 106.) He is contrasting faith with mistaken 'religious beliefs'. True faith for him amounts to the same thing as true religious belief. But as we shall see in the following chapter, one has to treat the term with care. I would say that it is equally as absurd to talk of 'genuine' faith as it is of 'false' faith.

The tendency for anthropologists and philosophers to characterise *religion* as having come about through fear and bad science is all too common, and those who are familiar with Wittgenstein and Phillips, will be aware of their repeated criticism of this view. James Frazer attracted most of the attention because of Wittgenstein's famous comments on *The Golden Bough*. Frazer gives us a picture of primitive man coming to terms with the terrifying world by inventing spirits more powerful than himself. And primitive man has a crude, incomplete understanding of nature; we can (according to Phillips) say that

> primitive man does not fully grasp the character of causal connections. He is ignorant enough to confuse a connection in thought, an ideal connection, with an empirical causal connection, a real connection. Such confusions are essential in explaining how magic managed to impress people.[450]

This confusion is seen as mistaken science, but, it is claimed, allayed fear to some degree. Phillips summarises Frazer:

> Instead of thinking that magic powers controlled the elements along with fortune and misfortune, he concluded that some far more powerful spirit must control all these things. In this way, belief in God is born. Man no longer faced a capricious nature, but a God who had reasons for everything that happened, great or small. Naturally, in such circumstances, the reasonable thing to do was to make sure that God was on one's side by obeying His will and offering him gifts. Yet as time went on, it was obvious that there is as little connection between life's events and religious practices as there had been between such events and magical practices. Man had come of age. He learnt to recognize the real causes of things and to accept what happened to him realistically.[451]

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[450] *Religion without Explanation*, p. 28.
[451] Ibid., p. 31.

Pre-religion magic, for Frazer, *is* close to science:

> Wherever sympathetic magic occurs in its pure unadulterated form, it assumes that in nature one event follows another necessarily and invariably without the intervention of any spiritual or personal agency. Thus its fundamental conception is identical with that of modern science; underlying the whole system is a faith, implicit but real and firm, in the order and uniformity of nature. The magician does not doubt that the same causes will always produce the same effects, that the performance of the proper ceremony, accompanied by the appropriate spell, will inevitably be attended by the desired result...[452]

But, of course, 'all magic is necessarily false and barren; for if it were ever to become true and fruitful, it would no longer be magic but science.'[453] What it all comes down to is the understanding practitioners have of the laws of nature. 'For the magician as for the scientist, there is an unerring and regular system of laws of nature which can be understood and subsequently used to one's advantage.'[454] Those who practice magic misunderstand the nature of such laws. Those who accept magic are thinking, but badly. And it was when practitioners realised that they could not control the laws of nature, that they accepted religion: 'men for the first time recognised their inability to manipulate at pleasure certain natural forces which hitherto they had believed to be completely within their control.'[455] For Frazer magic is, in one sense at least, closer to science than religion, for both magic and science

> take for granted that the course of nature is determined, not by the passions or caprice of personal beings, but by the operation of immutable laws acting mechanically.[456]

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[452] *The Golden Bough*, p. 49.
[453] Ibid., p. 50.
[454] *Wittgenstein, Frazer and Religion*, p. 10.
[455] *The Golden Bough*, p. 57.
[456] *The Golden Bough*, p. 51.

Gradually, realising that he was powerless in the face of nature, primitive man

changed.

>...foot by foot he must have yielded, with a sigh, the ground which he had
>once viewed as his own. Now it would be the wind, now the rain, now the
>sunshine, now the thunder, that he confessed himself unable to wield at will.[457]

Thus, over time, notions concerning religion developed. Frazer's definition of religion

is as follows:

>A propitiation or conciliation of powers superior to man which are believed to
>direct and control the course of nature and of human life. Thus defined, relig-
>ion consists of two elements, a theoretical and a practical, namely, a belief in
>powers higher than man and an attempt to propitiate or please them.[458]

The development of primitive man's attempts to understand the world, and its natural

laws, and his attempts to solve related problems, used ways of thinking, as well as

methods, that might be considered appropriate for science:

>The slow, the never-ending approach to truth consists in perpetually forming
>and testing hypotheses, accepting those which at the time seem to fit the facts
>and rejecting the others. The views of natural causation embraced by the sav-
>age magician no doubt appear to us manifestly false and absurd; yet in their
>day they were legitimate hypotheses, though they have not stood the test of
>experience[459]

Frazer is viewing the progress of man's spiritual development in the light of his un-

derstanding of science. Magic is found, through experience, to be unsatisfactory by

the more intelligent members of society.[460] For these people, 'magic is gradually su-

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[457] Ibid., p. 58.
[458] Ibid., p. 50.
[459] Ibid., p. 62.
[460] 'In magic man depends on his own strength to meet the difficulties and dangers that beset him on
every side. He believes in a certain established order of nature on which he can surely count, and which

perseded by religion, which explains the succession of natural phenomena as regulated by the will, the passion, or the caprice of spiritual beings like man in kind, though vastly superior to him in power.'[461] But religion too, seems like a poor explanation, 'For it assumes that the succession of natural events is not determined by immutable laws, but is to some extent variable and irregular....'[462] Closer examination, however, reveals that indeed there is 'rigid uniformity' to be found in nature.

> In the last analysis magic, religion, and science are nothing but theories of thought; and as science has supplanted its predecessors, so it may hereafter be itself superseded by some more perfect hypothesis.[463]

So, the notion of religion as false or mistaken science can be seen explicitly in Frazer's *The Golden Bough*.

This *understanding* of religion places it in opposition to the contemporary understanding of the natural world. For if it concerns

> a belief in superhuman beings who rule the world, and, their favour, it clearly assumes that the course of nature is to some extent elastic or variable, and that we can persuade or induce the mighty beings who control it to deflect, for our benefit, the current of events from the channel in which they would otherwise flow.[464]

This is simply, but effectively put and the implications are clear. Frazer goes on:

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he can manipulate for his own ends. When he discovers his mistake, when he recognises sadly that both the order of nature which he had assumed and the control which he had believed himself to exercise over it were purely imaginary, he ceases to rely on his own intelligence and his own unaided efforts, and throws himself humbly on the mercy of certain great invisible beings behind the veil of nature, to whom he now ascribes all those far-reaching powers which he once arrogated to himself.' (Ibid., p. 711.)

[461] Ibid., p. 711.
[462] Ibid., p. 712.
[463] Ibid., p. 712.
[464] Ibid., p. 51.

The distinction between the two conflicting views of the universe turns on their answer to the crucial question, Are the forces which govern the world conscious and personal, or unconscious and impersonal?[465]

Magic and religion, then, for Frazer are superstitious. They are connected to science, in that they are made up of hypotheses that can be tested. They are *both* explanations. They were fine for their time and represented contemporary knowledge of the day, but experience showed that they simply did not work in the way the primitive people thought they worked. Thus Frazer takes magic and religion as *primitive* sciences, that is as pseudo-sciences which compete with the real thing and which contemporary scientific understanding undermines, shows to be unworkable, a misunderstanding of nature. It is clear that Wittgenstein simply cannot accept that any of this is an adequate account of primitive people's relations with religious beliefs:

> The nonsense here is that Frazer represents these people as if they had a completely false (even insane) idea of the course of nature, whereas they only possess a peculiar interpretation of the phenomena. That is, if they were to write it down, their knowledge of nature would not differ *fundamentally* from ours. Only their *magic* is different.[466]

Perhaps the most important statement given by Wittgenstein here is as follows:

> Frazer's account of the magical and religious views of mankind is unsatisfactory: it makes these views look like *errors*. Was Augustine in error, then, when he called upon God on every page of the *Confessions*? But-one might say-if he was not in error, surely the Buddhist holy man was-or anyone else-whose religion gives expression to completely different views. But *neither* of them was in error, except when he set forth a theory.[467]

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[465] Ibid., p. 51.
[466] Wittgenstein, Ludwig. 'Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough' in *Sources and Perspectives*. Hassocks: The Harvester Press, 1979, p. 74.
[467] Ibid., p. 61.

Part of my intention in giving the exposition of Frazer was to illustrate the common notion that superstition arises from fear and is a *form* of, or is akin to, pseudo-science. But I do wish to resist the temptation to accept blindly the criticisms by Wittgenstein, of which I'll be giving more later.[468] Before coming to *my* worries about Frazer and Wittgenstein, I want to look at Brian Clack's take on Wittgenstein's attack. One of Wittgenstein's most eloquent critics, Clack, in his book *Wittgenstein, Frazer and Religion*, offers an important and much needed critique of Wittgenstein's hostility towards Frazer, *and* a rare defence of Frazer. He breaks down Wittgenstein's attack into three areas. He suggests that Wittgenstein attacks Frazer as 'a scholar and thinker', as 'a representative of his age', and 'as a proponent of a false theory of magic and religion, namely intellectualism...'[469] Clack thinks that none of these criticisms are particularly effective, or *important*. He writes that '...a great deal of Wittgenstein's ire is directed against Frazer as a thinker and as an unspiritual individual, who misinterprets the nature of – indeed, fails to grasp the *significance* of – magical rites...' and 'The principle charge is that Frazer fails to understand the nature of ritual because he lacks poetic imagination and is closed to the life of the spirit.'[470] Clack also suggests that Frazer is not well thought of in contemporary academia, so Wittgenstein's criticism can hardly be seen as being original. He goes on to claim that 'one cannot maintain

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[468] Wittgenstein's *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough*, were taken from a very early typescript of the Investigations. 'Rush Rhees edited the tiny volume in which the *Remarks* on Frazer were published in 1979. He thinks "we can see why" the handwritten remarks were left out of the typescript (Wittgenstein 1979). I'm not sure what he means. Perhaps Rhees can't believe that Wittgenstein responded seriously to primitive thought? But then why feature the *Remarks* on Frazer in a separate volume? Perhaps he knows that Wittgenstein's audience would have been put off by that response? If so, then we can see why they were left out. Confronted with such attitudes, Wittgenstein was bound to introduce his new philosophy in other terms.' (Zengotita, Thomas de. 'On Wittgenstein's *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough*'. *Cultural Anthropology*. Vol. 4, No. 4 (November 1989), p. 390.)
[469] *Wittgenstein, Frazer and Religion*, p. 13.
[470] Ibid., p. 14.

(as Wittgensteinians often do) that the most direct criticisms of Frazer in the *Remarks* are exceptional. If anything they are now rather ordinary.'[471] Elsewhere he writes that

> A rather lazy reading of Wittgenstein's *Remarks on Frazer* has become the received understanding of his critique of *The Golden Bough*. It is this: in Frazer we find *intellectualism*: magical and religious beliefs are (and arise as) *theories* of the world and its workings, and the *practices* which spring from these theories are (abortive) attempts to influence those workings (in other words, rituals are instrumental in character).[472]

I think Clack is misunderstanding the Wittgensteinians. The first criticism attributed to Wittgenstein by Clack is that Frazer is unspiritual and is not 'poetically imaginative'. He quotes from Frazer as a defence: '…without some touch of poetic fancy, it is hardly possible to enter into the heart of the people. A frigid rationalist will knock in vain at the rose-wreathed portal of fairyland' And Clack cites his 'great influence on creative artists'.[473] But Wittgenstein's criticisms of Frazer can be seen as *philosophical* criticisms of ways of thinking about ritual and beliefs, and part of their force is that these are ways of thinking that can still be found today. Wittgenstein and Phillips have not said that Frazer is a frigid rationalist and they are not making judgements about his influence on artists, but about *ways of thinking* that are still commonplace in popular and academic discourse, together with the notion that the primitive people were *always* mistaken.[474] In short both Wittgenstein and Phillips attack Frazer for his bad philosophy. Throughout the writings of the Wittgensteinians there are attacks on ways of thinking about philosophical problems that have been touched by the methods and approaches associated with the Sciences. If taken *simply* as a critique of a Victo-

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[471] Ibid., p. 15.
[472] Clack, Brian R. 'Response to Phillips'. *Religious Studies*. Vol. 39, No. 2 (June 2003), p. 203.
[473] Ibid., p. 14.
[474] Of course we can make the criticism of Wittgenstein and Phillips that they seem to be saying that primitive people were *never* mistaken. I think that this is an acceptable criticism of Phillips when he talks about prayer etc. I do not think that there is enough in the way of acknowledgement that believers can be or often are mistaken.

rian thinker, however, the *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough* are commonplace. How many philosophers or anthropologists, for example, would defend the methods and the thinking *behind* the methods of a Victorian anthropologist now?[475] And of course, to attack a thinker from another age is easy and it is all *too* easy to criticise (and misunderstand) thinkers from the past. Wittgenstein is aware of this: 'One age misunderstands another; and a *petty* age misunderstands all the others in its own nasty way.'[476] But I don't think the criticisms by Wittgenstein and Phillips are hackneyed, for what they criticise in Frazer's approach is a way of thinking that is still dominant both within academic and popular philosophy. Take the following quote from the *Remarks*:

> Frazer would be capable of believing that a savage dies because of an error. In books used in primary schools it is said that Attila had undertaken his great military campaigns because he believed that he possessed the sword of the god of thunder.[477]

A recent BBC documentary investigated Constantine's vision of a cross before he went on to take Rome, and scientists' claims that what he actually saw was a meteor hitting the ground with such force that it caused a mushroom cloud to appear. The following is from Eusebius' *Vita Constantini*:

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[475] Caution should be exercised when reading Clack. I think he is not quite correct here. At the time Wittgenstein had an abridged version of *The Golden Bough* read to him, Frazer was enormously popular. Mary Beard in her impressively researched article *Frazer, Leach and Virgil: The Popularity (and Unpopularity) of The Golden Bough*, shows the level of acclaim the work enjoyed then. A decade later it was still massively popular: 'In New York in 1940 it competed equally with *Mein Kampf*, as the best-selling non-fiction reprint. *The Golden Bough* (According to the London Evening News) accompanied Mrs Neville Chamberlain on most of her travels.[...]. For one writer of the period, it was quite simply "one of the masterpieces of all time" and its author one of "the giants of English prose."' (Beard, Mary. 'Frazer, Leach, and Virgil: The Popularity (and unpopularity) of *The Golden Bough*'. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*. Vol. 34, No. 2 (April 1992), p. 214.) And we should not underestimate the popularity of Frazer today: 'The Golden Bough has achieved classic status as one of the symbols of British middle-class culture. Perhaps not read very often now, at least not from the beginning to the end of the twelve volumes in the third edition, it still does remain constantly in print (at least in the abridged edition), bought and admired by thousands.'(Ibid., p. 213.)
[476] *Culture and Value*, p. 86.
[477] *Sources and Perspectives*, p. 68.

About the time of the midday sun, when day was just turning, he said he saw with his own eyes, up in the sky and resting over the sun, a cross-shaped trophy formed from light, and a text attached to it which said, 'By this conquer'.[478]

What this points to is not simply the absurdity, the stupidity of the investigation (as if Constantine wouldn't have known the difference between a cloud shaped like a mushroom and a 'cross-shaped trophy formed from light'), and the method of investigation (various tests, experiments) but, most importantly, the *way of thinking* that would initiate such an investigation. The very fact that the scientists didn't reflect on the words of the text, didn't take the time to think about the context of what was said, but concluded instead that the spread of Christianity in Europe rested on a mistake (a *scientific* mistake), shows this. It does seem absurd to accept that the spread of Christianity came about as a result of a crude superstitious illusion.[479]

Frazer's work might appear tired nowadays, a crude *interpretation* of ancient rituals, but there is in contemporary philosophy much that is problematic for exactly the same reasons as Frazer's work on religion was flawed, and that is what is important about Wittgenstein's criticisms. Clack believes that his major criticism is that Frazer fails to understand ritual and practices because he lacks poetic imagination and is incapable of appreciating the life of the spirit. But *is* this the principle charge? Or is it that by his very method Frazer ignores the life in which these practices have their life (we might say that Frazer does not take religion seriously enough for Wittgenstein)?

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[478] Cameron, Averil and Hall, Stuart G (eds.) *Eusebius: Life of Constantine.* Oxford: Clarendon press, 1999, p. 28.

[479] And we should remember that the vision was likely to have been invented, and added later to Eusebius's account. The scientists were probably ignorant of this when they made the documentary. The short section describing the vision is the most famous, and yet, 'Eusebius bases his account of the campaign against Maxentius and the Battle of the Milvian Bridge (28 October 312) on what he had already written.[...].But...there is no hint of a vision. He inserts here, more than twenty-five years later, an elaborate story which, he claims, he had heard from the emperor personally, 'a long time after', and 'confirmed with oaths' (28. 1).' (*Eusebius: Life of Constantine*, p. 204.)

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That is, he doesn't (because of his approach, his method) come to a deep or clear understanding of practices, and is unable to enter into the *spirit* of ancient cultures. And Wittgenstein uses Frazer's mistakes to illustrate the problems in thinking about puzzles in a certain way.

But Clack's criticisms are important, for they remind us of a danger which I hope to highlight later in the chapter. Some of Wittgenstein's comments, I think, have been absorbed almost without thought into certain areas of intellectual culture. The following is from M. O'C Drury:

> Now Frazer did a valuable piece of work in collecting from all over the world the rites and myths of many different cultures. If he could have been content to do just this and no more it would have been a great book.[480]

Despite the difficulties one might have with what Frazer has to say about religion and magic, and even though one might not approve of his method, it is hard to deny that his work *is* a great achievement. Clack also highlights something that isn't often spoken about concerning Wittgenstein's approach to Frazer. Part of this revolves around what he thinks of science: 'The source of Frazer's error is thus attributed to his obsession with *science*. Practices are turned into mistaken science in a scientific age.' Clack writes:

> ...it is this hatred for the present age which constitutes the unifying theme.[...].Though Wittgenstein's notes are certainly an important contribution to debates in the philosophy of religion, it is as a critique of a particular phase of our culture's development that the *Remarks* gain their ultimate significance.[481]

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[480] Drury, M.O.C. *The Danger of Words*. Bristol: Theommes Press, 1996, p. 8.
[481] *Wittgenstein, Frazer and Religion*, p. 13.

And of course, if this is what is most significant about Wittgenstein's examination, then it is not *that* significant. We have seen how I think that Clack is wrong here, and that the real significance lies in a critique, not of a phase of cultural development, but of a whole way of thinking, of the *natural* inclination to think about problems in certain, limiting and limited ways. But Clack does give us *something* important concerning the nature of Wittgenstein's criticism of Frazer, which should not be ignored by those who are sympathetic to Wittgenstein's comments on religion. In highlighting the negative attacks by Wittgenstein he lets us see that he is perhaps doing far more than he wants to. He offers stimulation for us to at least consider the notion that Wittgenstein is not just working through grammatical investigation, exposing errors or confused language-games, but that he is giving vent to strong feelings that do not appear to be at all constructive. This 'hatred for the present age' (and, indeed, for science), does seem to be present, and if Wittgenstein's feeling is not quite as strong as *that*, as hatred, it has at the very least, something of a tangible, almost impatient dissatisfaction. And the manifestation of such feelings is clearly *more* than advocacy or even *prescription*. This is not the image of Wittgenstein that many might have, of a philosopher who wishes to do nothing more than 'give a certain kind of attention to our surroundings without meddling in them.'[482] The comments on Frazer do, at times, make one wonder:

> Frazer is much more savage than most of his savages, for they are not as far removed from the understanding of a spiritual matter as a twentieth-century Englishman. His explanations of primitive practices are much cruder than the meaning of these practices themselves.[483]

[482] *Philosophy's Cool Place*, p. ix.
[483] *Sources and Perspectives*, p. 68.

In a frank review of a book edited by Phillips, Clack writes of the typically Wittgensteinian 'technique of abusing Frazer', who is shown as

> being 'narrow', and unable to see the depth in magico-religious rituals. Phillips patently takes his warrant for such abuse from the unpleasant *ad hominem* arguments levelled against Frazer by Wittgenstein, but just because Wittgenstein is abusive it does not mean that the rest of us should be. Frazer deserves better than that...[484]

This is somewhat disarming, and appears to be not all that easy to respond to. But we *can* respond to it. Clack's attack is, perhaps, not as surprising as it first appears to be. It is an expression of his anger at the *way* Wittgenstein and those who came after have criticised Frazer, and we might feel that he is justified in his revulsion. But such frustration *might* be related to the *kind* of reminders Wittgenstein was offering to certain philosophers in his attack on Frazer, who, according to Phillips, saw their

> criticism of religion as a means of liberating people from darkness, and bringing them into the light. That is why, I suspect, there was so much anger, in certain quarters, among some heirs to the Enlightenment, when Wittgenstein said that James Frazer, in The Golden Bough, was more savage than the savages he discussed; that his explanation of primitive rituals was cruder than anything to be found in the rituals themselves.[485]

What I want to do now is to examine the understanding of superstition that both Frazer and the Wittgensteinians accept, to investigate the implications of seeing superstition as a scientific mistake. We have seen that Wittgenstein and Frazer's conceptions of superstition are *exactly* the same. Frazer takes religion to be a sort of primitive science, a pseudo-science that competes with the real thing and which contemporary scientific understanding undermines, shows to be unworkable, a misunderstanding of nature. Religion involves

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[484] *Ars Disputandi*, p. 5.
[485] *Wittgensteinian Fideism?*, p. 83.

a belief in superhuman beings who rule the world, and, second, an attempt to win their favour, it clearly assumes that the course of nature is to some extent elastic or variable, and that we can persuade or induce the mighty beings who control it to deflect, for our benefit, the current of events from the channel in which they would otherwise flow.[486]

Wittgenstein would agree with Frazer here, that the above description is of an absurd belief, nothing more than superstition. And for Phillips too, if the believer prays to God with the hope of intervention in the world, nature, then it is superstition:

It seems that as a result of the prayer, God brings about *this* rather than *that*. If we admit this, must we not say that the relation between prayer and God, or between God and the world, is causal, and that prayer is a way of getting things done?[487]

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[486] *The Golden Bough*, p. 51.
[487] *The Concept of Prayer*, p. 112.

But while Phillips and Wittgenstein have the same understanding of superstition as Frazer, the difference, of course, lies in their understanding of what religion *really* is. From Frazer: 'By religion, then, I understand a propitiation or conciliation of powers superior to man which are believed to direct and control the course of nature and of human life.'[488] And for Frazer this is all superstition. Religion *is* superstition. This is radically different from Wittgenstein's understanding: 'Christianity is not a doctrine, not, I mean, a theory about what has happened and will happen to the human soul, but a description of something that actually takes place in human life.'[489] and 'Religion is, as it were, the calm bottom of the sea at its deepest point, which remains calm however high the waves on the surface may be.'[490]

For the Wittgensteinian, Frazer is ignoring the form of life in which religious beliefs have their life, the connections between beliefs and the lives of those who hold such beliefs, and the consequences are disastrous: 'When religious beliefs are torn from their scriptural contexts they become statements of fact, theories, hypotheses, metaphysical theses.'[491] And Phillips isn't alone in finding the views of thinkers who detach practices from human life grossly objectionable. G. K. Chesterton wrote the following:

> This total misunderstanding of the real nature of ceremonial gives rise to the most awkward and dehumanized versions of the conduct of men in rude lands or ages. The man of science, not realizing that ceremonial is essentially a thing which is done without reason, has to find a reason for every sort of ceremonial, and, as might be supposed, the reason is generally a very absurd one-

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[488] *The Golden Bough*, p. 50.
[489] *Culture and Value*, p. 28.
[490] Ibid., p. 53.
[491] *Religion without Explanation*, p. 184.

absurd because it originates not in the simple mind of the barbarian, but in the sophisticated mind of the professor.

The consequences of such an approach might include an arrogant dismissal of ancient practices and beliefs without an investigation into the roles they play in primitive cultures:

> The learned man will say, for instance, 'The natives of Mumbo-jumbo Land believe that the dead man can eat, and will require food upon his journey to the other world. This is attested by the fact that they place food in the grave, and that any family not complying with this rite is the object of the anger of the priests and the tribe.' It is like saying, 'The English in the twentieth century believed that a dead man could smell. This is attested by the fact that they always covered his grave with lilies, violets , or other flowers.[...].It may be of course that savages put food with a dead man because they think a dead man can eat'.[...].But personally I do not believe that they think anything of the kind.[492]

It is unfortunate that history is littered with such examples. One of the most peculiar instances of scientists (bewitched by the surface grammar) approaching religion as though it were 'scientific', is to be found in the 'Prayer Gauge Debate' of the late nineteenth century. As with the approach taken by Frazer, such ways of thinking still exert a hold over approaches to religion, within (and without) academia.

> I would still say that the majority of philosophers look on religious belief with condescension. They may not bother to say it, but I suspect that, for them, the presence of religious belief in our culture is a hangover from a primitive state that our modernity has long superseded.[493]

The debate provides a good background against which we can view Phillips' understanding of prayer, and provides a necessary contrast between two ways of thinking about religion. It might allow us the opportunity to view Phillips' almost universally

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[492] Chesterton, G. K.*G. K. Chesterton: A Selection from his non-Fictional Prose*. London: Faber and Faber, 1970, p. 194.
[493] *Philosophy's Cool Place*, p. 164.

maligned understanding of prayer in a more sympathetic light. Importantly, it concerns two forms of prayer that Phillips famously discusses in *The Concept of Prayer*: petitionary prayer and prayers of thanksgiving.

By examining the issues surrounding the debate we might at least appreciate *why* Phillips was compelled to talk about prayer in the way that he did; why, as so many thinkers appear to ignore what he sees as the importance of prayer, he felt he had to offer an understanding of prayer that is not constricted by the kind of thinking that places it within the same conceptual framework as science,[494] or of any action whose efficacy is in some way 'physically' causal. For the Wittgensteinian, such a way of thinking misunderstands the nature of true prayer and religious practice. It is the variety of issues and implications of such misunderstandings that will concern us for the rest of the thesis.

In this famous debate, we see different language-games becoming juxtaposed, leading to unproductive investigations into the meaning and worth of prayers, and, more importantly, the misunderstanding of where the *importance* of prayer lies. What started it all was the occasion of the Prince of Wales contracting typhoid fever in 1871. When things were looking critical and he became gravely ill, and when many began to think that he would die of this, the same condition that killed his father, the country's clergy were asked to pray for him. A prayer was written, explicitly pleading for the Prince's life, acknowledging that only God could intervene and cure him of this disease:

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[494] While said in private, prayers did not gain the attention of nineteenth century scientists. It was only when a particular understanding of the nature of prayer occupied such a prominent place in the public sphere that the scientist began to focus his attention on it. It was when 'it was "forced upon his attention as a form of physical energy, or as the equivalent of such energy." Under those circumstances the physicist claimed "the right of subjecting it to those methods of examination from which all our present knowledge of the physical world is derived."' (Turner, Frank M. 'Rainfall, Plagues, and the Prince of Wales: a Chapter in the Conflict of religion and Science'. *The Journal of British Studies*. Vol. 13, No. 2 (May 1974), p. 48.)

O Almighty God, Father of all mercies, we implore Thy aid for this sick member of the Royal family. To thine ever watchful care we commend him, his body and soul. O thou heavenly Physician, Thou only canst heal him...[495]

Then, on the tenth Anniversary of his father's death, he showed signs of recovery. To thank God for His intervention, for His response to the prayer, there was a thanksgiving service in Westminster Abbey and a day of thanksgiving for the population.[496] So here we have prayers of petition and thanksgiving in action, and a particular understanding of these two forms of prayer.

While some clergy apparently saw the recovery as God's intervention, the scientists of the time were profoundly sceptical. And in response to this controversy, the famous physicist, John Tyndall, presented an article on how to assess the efficacy of such prayers. While authorship of the article, entitled *The 'Prayer for the Sick'-Hints Towards a Serious Attempt to Estimate its Value*, is sometimes attributed to Tyndall (he certainly promoted it), Frank M. Turner found evidence to suggest it was written by Henry Thompson.[497] Tyndall was convinced that the only way to prove that prayers can have an effect (or to make any kind of progress here on the problem) was to carry out a serious scientific study. Clearly, in this case, if God *had* intervened in the natural, physical world, it would not be inappropriate to apply scientific method to investigate this phenomenon. If the act of prayer *could* produce some kind of physical

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[495] Lindberg, David C. and Numbers, Ronald L. *When Science and Christianity Meet*. Chicago: university of Illinois Press, 2003, p. 211.

[496] Here is the notice from Queen Victoria:
'My Lords And Gentlemen,
I avail myself of the opportunity afforded by your reassembling for the discharge of your momentous duties to renew the expression of my thankfulness to the Almighty for the deliverance of my dear son, the Prince of Wales, from the most imminent danger, and of my lively recollection of the profound and universal sympathy shown by my loyal people during the period of anxiety and trial.
I purpose that on Tuesday, the 27th inst, conformably to the good and becoming usage of former days, the blessing thus received shall be acknowledged on behalf of the nation by a thanksgiving in the metropolitan cathedral.' (Ibid., p. 212.)

[497] 'Authorship is attributed to Henry Thompson in the British Museum catalogue and in Zachary Cope, *The Versatile Victorian, being the Life of Sir Henry Thompson* (London, 1951), p. 108.' (*The Journal of British Studies*, p. 46.)

force, then scientific investigation should show a result. It was decided that the best form of prayer to examine, that which seemed most likely to produce a correlation between the action of prayer and physical intervention, were prayers offered for the sick. What was put forward was simply that prayed for wards of sick people would be compared with those not prayed for.[498] Underpinning the Victorians' position here was the acceptance that nature is uniform, inflexible, operating under strict laws and that this understanding was an advance from the past. Thus for John Tyndall[499] the clergy were not so different from the savage: 'In the fall of the cataract the savage saw the leap of a spirit, and the echoed thunder pool was to him the hammer clang of an exasperated God.'[500] The hostility of such thinkers to the power of prayer was troubling to Christian culture. For what was Christianity without prayer? Christians reacted in different ways to this, but the strongest defence against the scientists concerned the role of prayer, and can be illustrated by this, from *The Spectator*:

> You pray, if you pray in the spirit of Christ at all, not for a specific external end, but because of a deep relief to pour out your heart to God in the frankest way possible to limited human nature, and in the hope that if your *wish* is not granted, your want may be.[501]

This view is echoed in *The Concept of Prayer*:

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[498] 'But I ask that one single ward or hospital, under the care of first-rate physicians and surgeons, containing certain numbers of patients afflicted with those diseases which have been best studied, and of which the mortality rates are best known, whether the diseases are those which are treated by medical or by surgical remedies, should be, during a period of not less, say, than three or five years, made the object of special prayer by the whole body of the faithful, and that, at the end of that time, the mortality rates should be compared with the past rates, and also with that of other leading hospitals, similarly well managed, during the same period.' (*The Journal of British Studies*, p. 460.)

[499] In all this the most fervent critic of the power of prayer was the cousin of Charles Darwin, Francis Galton, writer of the acclaimed *Hereditary Genius*: 'Galton shared with Victorian scientists such as Tyndall two presuppositions, which he brought to the prayer gauge controversy. The first, reflected in his interest in inherited traits, was an overwhelming confidence in the law of physical causality. The second was a mistrust of religion in general and clergy in particular. In analyzing the attributes of all of the leading professions for Hereditary Genius, he found clerics both physically and emotionally weaker than average.' (*When Science and Christianity Meet*, p. 215.)

[500] Ibid., p. 213.

[501] Ibid., p. 215.

When deep religious believers pray *for* something, they are not so much asking God to bring this about, but in a way telling Him of the strength of their desires.[502]

What the scientists and those who prayed for Prince Albert miss, taking Phillips' view, was any kind of *moral* depth. Scientists dismissed superstitious prayer because it violated the laws of nature. Phillips accepts this; the prayers were asking for something and the scientists saw prayer as being just this, as asking God for a favour. Henry Churchill King, writing in 1915, is critical of Tyndall's lack of sensitivity:

> Tyndall's idea seems to be that of applying a gauge to prayer, in the same sense in which one might apply a gauge to steam.[...].Prayer, for Christ, is no force put simply in man's hands to be measured by the number of prayers or the numbers of person's or the length of time in prayer. There are no units of compulsive force on God to be so gauged. Prayer is no compulsion or command on God.[503]

His objections to the prayer gauge debate seem obvious, and yet they highlight profound difficulties that remain with us today.

> Christ seems to be really arguing, in his teaching concerning prayer, in Matthew, somewhat in this fashion: We are to pray, not because God is reluctant and because His will must be battered down by incessant repetition-"Use not vain repetitions, as the Gentiles do." Nor are we to pray as a short cut to things, making prayer largely selfish and material. [504]

The final sentence could have been written by Phillips, and, as we shall see in the following chapter, he comes close to saying just that. But to look at such debates has a crucial philosophical function, that is, according to Phillips, 'to enquire whether, if one understands religious beliefs in this way one is illuminating or obscuring possi-

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[502] *The Concept of Prayer*, p. 121.
[503] King, Henry Churchill. 'Difficulties Concerning Prayer II'. *The Biblical World.* Vol. 46, No.5 (November 1915), p. 281.
[504] Ibid., p. 282.

bilities of meaning.'[505] The scientists involved in the prayer gauge debate wanted to show, through scientific investigation, that prayer did not work in the way (they thought) religion claimed it did.[506] But despite such clearheaded destruction of superstition, they had a very narrow understanding of religion and the importance of prayer, of what makes prayer important within religious tradition; by their dismissal of religious practice, they *were* obscuring meanings of prayer that have little to do with what is 'scientific', the depth grammar of prayer; it is these meanings that Phillips attempts to draw out in his discussions of the nature of prayer. He would say that Tyndall and Frazer's characterisation of religion and prayer has little to do with what is genuinely *religious*. How are we to understand what this means?

Bela Szabados offers a neat summary of Phillips' position here, emphasising the troubling implications that emerge from the view that in praying to God one prays to a being for favours. There are important moral issues that are inextricable from such understanding of prayers that need to be addressed:

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[505] *Religion Without Explanation*, p. 27.

[506] There is no doubt that such thinking occupies an important position in certain areas of contemporary life. A surprising variation on what these scientists were trying to do emerged recently. Instead of trying to show that prayer did not heal the sick, some scientists have been trying to prove the efficacy of prayer with science, as a form of *therapy*: 'In a recent study, physicians at St. Luke's Hospital in Kansas City, Missouri, found that patients admitted to a coronary care unit who were prayed for without their knowledge for four weeks suffered about 10 percent fewer complications than those who had no one assigned to pray for them. At Harvard University, Herbert Benson, in an experiment said to include more than 500 patients, hopes to show that prayer can heal cardiac disease. (The study is being "kept secret" to avoid the possibility that others will pray for these patients.) Meanwhile, investigators at Duke University are employing prayer for seriously ill patients who are undergoing cardiac catheterization, while others at Temple University are evaluating whether the prayers of volunteers can speed the development of babies born prematurely.' (Cohen, Cynthia B., Wheeler Sondra E. et al. 'Prayer as Therapy: A challenge to Religious Belief and Professional Ethics'. *The Hastings Center Report*. Vol. 30, No. 3 (May/June 2000), p. 40.) These examples are all from the last ten years. The authors of the report go on to give further examples but also emphasise that, 'There is no way to "prove" a causal connection between prayer for recovery and the desired effect.' And of course the reason why this is so should be clear: 'Those who engage in such studies, no matter how well intentioned, overlook the reality that prayer is not the sort of practice that can be tethered and measured, standardized and randomized.' (Ibid., p. 42.) As we shall see, Phillips viewed such thinking less kindly, aware of the serious moral implications.

Consider how philosophical theism distorts the concept of prayer and the belief in immortality, thereby creating needless difficulties in people's lives. According to it, the standard picture of prayer is an instance of asking someone for something, or telling someone something, with the difference that this person is a Super Being. This reduces prayer to a superstition, since the person praying would believe the prayer to be causally efficacious. Prayer becomes an ego-centered propitiation of God to intervene in the course of events so that it would fulfil one's desires.[...].Looking at the employment of prayer in the context of religion, Phillips offers an account of prayer as a practice in which believers express and reflect on concerns that lie deep within them.[507]

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[507] *Wittgenstein Fideism?* p. 9.

This helps us see the contrast between Phillips' understanding of prayer and the Victorian scientists' views. Their understanding of prayer is problematic in that they see prayer as simply a communication with a being, who would then act on the prayer; their difficulty with it is that it transgresses natural laws.[508] I will now give an exposition of Phillips' understanding of two forms of prayer. His conception, then, of what is genuinely religious in connection with prayer can be said to have three features (all were ignored by the scientists involved in the prayer gauge controversy):

i) The gratitude for life or recognition of the importance of life.

ii) The efficacy of prayer as 'non-causal'.

iii) The vital connection to life.

Phillips' discussion of prayers of thanksgiving and petition best illustrate these interrelated features. I will come back to prayers of petition, but the first feature is most lucidly expressed when he discusses prayers of thanksgiving: 'To recognize that one's life depends on God, that everything depends on Him, is closely connected with thanking God for one's existence.' How did those who thanked God for the recovery of Prince Albert see their relationship with Him? As Phillips points out, 'Thankfulness in ordinary circumstances...is linked to the fact that *this* was done rather than *that*.'[509] In ordinary life one thanks people for what they have done, for kind thoughts or a gift. You thank, are grateful to, a stranger who helps you up when you fall, or

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[508] Many Christians might criticise the debate because it appears to assume that prayer will always be answered.

[509] *The Concept of Prayer*, p. 96.

runs after you with your wallet. One is thanking the person for *something*. And as he

points out, what is important here is the *intention*. The action taken might not be sig-

nificant, but if the intention is selfless, it is something that can be appreciated. One

might not need help, but are grateful for the person who offers it.

> Thanking another person involves a value judgement: there must be something
> worthy of thanks. The judgement may have the deed as its object or the inten-
> tion of the agent, or both. For instance, one can be grateful for the sincerity of
> a person's motives in trying to help one, and yet not be grateful for the 'help',
> since it might be of the wrong kind.[510]

Prayers of thanksgiving offered for Prince Albert are related to the everyday under-

standing of thanksgiving, only different in that they are offered for a superhuman act

by a supernatural being. God is seen as a powerful agent capable of saving a life. The

thanks offered here were for God's kind act. The difference between this conception

of thanksgiving and those prayers of thanksgiving of which Phillips approves is,

partly at least, that the latter are not necessarily for some 'thing' in life, but for *all*

life.[511]

> When the believer thanks God for his creation, it seems to be a thanksgiving
> for his life as a whole, for everything, meaning the good *and* the evil within
> his life, since despite such evil, thanking God is still said to be possible. [512]

While one would thank someone for something, it would not make sense to be grate-

ful to someone for 'everything'. We *do* say 'thanks for everything' to someone who

has conscientiously helped with the organisation of an important event, or who has

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[510] Ibid., p. 97.
[511] 'Giving thanks to God does not seem linked to a value judgement in the way in which thanking hu-
man beings seems to be. Recognition of human goodness is often an inference from what people have
done, whereas recognition of God's goodness does not seem to be based on an inference in this way.'
(Ibid., p. 97.)
[512] Ibid., p. 97.

looked after things while we have been away. But of course one is really thanking the person here for particular things, for helping with particular aspects of one's life. One is thanking them for all the things that they have helped with. But, according to Phillips,

> It would be odd to be grateful to someone for everything, not in the sense of everything that person has done for one, but in the sense of everything there is. No man can do everything. This is not because he lacks time, ability, or energy, but because it does not make sense to speak of anyone as having done everything.[513]

We need an example to illustrate this. Take the following snippet of a conversation between an aging, troubled Japanese Catholic novelist and his wife on a short visit to the seaside, from Shusako Endo's *Scandal*. The husband says:

> When I look out at this ocean, I realize how fortunate we've been to live as long as we have. First the war, and then the agonizing years of defeat. But we've finally been able to struggle to this point in our lives...

Then the wife: 'I always feel grateful for it when I go to mass. When I die I feel that I'll be able to say "thank you" to God.'[514] What would the suspicious, 'scientifically minded' philosopher have to say about this world view? How are we to understand her gratitude?[515] The feelings of hope and thankfulness underlying her words, are in some ways quite different from what we would ordinarily understand hope and thankfulness to be. It is not necessarily hope for anything and her thankfulness is for being

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[513] Ibid., p. 96.
[514] Endo, Shusako. *Scandal*. London: Penguin Books, 1989, p 150.
[515] I discuss the novel *The Diary of a Country Priest* in the following chapter, but it is worth noting here that there is only one reference to the content of the priest's prayers: 'Almost every day after mass I have to interrupt my act of thanksgiving to see some parishioner-usually ailing and asking for medicine.' (Bernanos, George. *The Diary of a Country Priest*. New York: Carroll & Graf, 1983, p. 102.) I think that it is significant that his prayers take the form of thanksgiving. And, as we shall see, it would be out of character for him to thank God for the contingent things *in* his life.

alive, for living; that is for *everything* in her life. This is what Phillips understands to be a genuinely religious attitude to life, the gratitude for being alive, expressing acceptance for everything, both good and bad. Phillips wants to show that giving thanks to God is not based on what God has done, is not a value judgement as it is (or tends to be) with humans (while at the same time being a part of life).[516] But we can only see this by contemplating the sense, the importance of what the believer says. The believer here is thanking God for everything, for the *horror* and joy. The couple having experienced so much death and humiliation in their lives still want to thank God. As Phillips insists, 'there seems to be no question of blaming God, but only of praising Him.' And also: 'To be able to give thanks to God is to be able to have a love of the world...the believer recognizes that life has hope; he is rescued from despair.'[517] The service of thanksgiving for Prince Albert's recovery contrasts strongly with this. The prayers are thanking God for His generous act. But the couple in the story are aging and very much aware of their approaching death. They would *never think* of asking God for a longer life. And they would never think of complaining that their prayers have gone unanswered. Their gratitude is, in part, an acceptance of life and its transience.

But viewing religious utterances from what can be considered a 'secular' (or from a 'scientific') position, carries the danger that religious language or prayers can *appear* to be selfish or to be the language of one deluded (and of course, even Phillips

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[516] The theologian Michael Joseph Brown, for example, thinks that 'Prayers of praise and thanksgiving are indirect forms of petition. Aristotle, in his *Rhetoric*, makes it clear that praise is an indirect form of request. It is a form of rhetoric that seeks to influence an individual (or individuals) regarding a virtue the speaker thinks the individual (individuals) ought to cultivate.[...].Thus, prayers of praise are indirect ways of influencing the activity or state of being of the deity. Likewise, prayers of thanksgiving are done in a response to an assistance or gift bestowed by the deity, whether unexpected or in answer to an expressed desire. In essence, one is asking for the continuity of divine beneficence.' (Brown, Michael Joseph. '"Panem Nostrum": The Problem of Petition and the Lord's Prayer'. *The Journal of Religion*. Vol. 80, No. 4 (October 2000), p. 597.)
[517] *The Concept of Prayer*, p. 97.

would say that this *can* be the case[518]). One is concerned about oneself; one is asking

God for something, thanking Him for something, berating Him, pleading with Him.

All of these are or could be concerned with events in one's life. There is none of this

selfishness or delusion in the words of the elderly wife. What is considered religious

by Phillips is 'not contingent on what happens in an individual's life.' The Catholic

couple express an acceptance of *everything*, their whole lives; the fact that they have

been able to go on living. They are not thanking God because life has gone well for

them, but because life has gone on; *because* they have life (they recognize the *impor-*

tance of life). They are not complaining about the horrible things they may have wit-

nessed, or thanking Him for certain things within their life (achievements, successes,

security). They have reached a stage in life when they seem to understand this. So,

they want to thank God for life. Rush Rhees writes the following:

> It is in my gratitude for life that I may come to love the world. If I am grateful
> to my parents, then I am grateful for the world. So it must go, I think. To be
> thankful for life is to view the world so. Or I might have said, to be thankful
> for life is to be able to say 'Thank God.'[519]

When the novelist's wife says that she will be able to say thank you to God, then per-

haps this is what she means. But what can be drawn from all this is that, for Phillips, a

religious attitude is one that does not place the individual, with his needs, at the centre

of the universe.

With petitionary prayers, we can see the second and third features of what Phillips

considers to be the properly religious understanding of the nature of prayer: its non-

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[518] Perhaps Phillips has not, in his writings, acknowledged that the majority of religious believers un-
doubtedly think about prayer in this way. This in part must account for the strong reaction among even
those who are hostile to religion: they are reacting against this 'superstitious' understanding, and do so
because this is the only understanding that confronts them.
[519] *Rush Rhees on Religion and Philosophy*, p. 163.

causal efficacy, and its vital connection to life. And we can see the contrasting features of what he considers to be superstitious prayer:

i) The concern for what happens within one's life.

ii) The causal efficacy of prayer, (indeed this is where the importance lies, in getting something done).

iii) The lack of real connection to the believer's life.[520]

Phillips thinks that prayers should not be, like spells or incantations, where what is important is whether what one says has the desired result. This is shallow, the words themselves appear to be not so important (they are of course, but not in the same way as words uttered in prayer. Certain spells, for example, require words to be uttered in a very precise way). What Phillips is saying here is that

> it does not matter from the point of view of *what is said* whether one says one thing or another; what matters is whether what is said works or not, that is, whether it brings about a desired end.[521]

Superstitious petitionary prayers are asking for something specific:

> In certain prayers for special favours, one seems to be dangerously close to equating prayer with incantation. In such cases, what one finds is closer to superstition than to prayer.[522]

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[520] 'Christianity is not a matter of saying a lot of prayers; in fact we are told not to do that. If you and I are to live religious lives, it mustn't be that we talk a lot about religion, but that our manner of life is different. It is my belief that only if you try to be helpful to other people will you in the end find your way to God.' Perhaps Wittgenstein is thinking of *Matthew* here: 'But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen *do*: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.

Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.'(*Matthew* 6:7-8)
[521] *The Concept of Prayer*, p. 114.
[522] Ibid., p. 115.

This kind of prayer can be uttered by those who are not religious (that is by those for whom religion plays no part in life). They might even have *declared* themselves to be opposed to religion, and yet at a time of crisis they utter words that appear to be prayer-like (the surface grammar appears to be exactly the same, to show that the words as used in such utterances are the same as a proper prayer). They might ask God to help them, when facing some terrible action or indeed their own annihilation:

> I heard a diver tell of an experience which occurred while he was searching a wreck. He lost his torch an could not find the exit of the hold. He prayed: "O God get me out of this. I'll do anything you want if only you'll let me find my way out"[523]

But this, for Phillips, is not *proper* prayer.[524] And it links to Wittgenstein's experiences during the First World War. The following is from Norman Malcolm:

> The diaries that Wittgenstein kept during the war reveal that he often prayed, not that he should be spared from death, but that he should meet it without cowardice and without losing control of himself.
>
> How will I behave when it comes to shooting? I am not afraid of being shot but of not doing my duty properly. God give me strength! Amen!
>
> If it is all over with me now, may I die a good death, mindful of myself. May I never lose myself! Now I might have the opportunity to the a decent human being, because I am face to face with death. May the spirit enlighten me.
>
> Brian McGuinness, biographer of Wittgenstein, says: 'Generally before action he prays like this: God be with me! The spirit be with me!' Wittgenstein volunteered for the extremely dangerous post of artillery observer in an advanced position. He wrote: 'perhaps nearness to death will bring light into my life'[525]

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[523] *The Concept of Prayer*, p. 117.

[524] We have to be aware here of the consternation many philosophers might feel at what Phillips says, and what this says of the practices of believers: 'I am not really convinced by this account of petitionary prayer. I think it is one-sided and turns the majority of believers in the world into superstitious people.[…].There is petition in petitionary prayer and there is nothing wrong with believing in divine intervention.' (Herck,Walter van. 'A Friend of Demea? The Meaning and Importance of Piety' in *D.Z. Phillips' Contemplative Philosophy of Religion*, p. 130.)

[525] *Wittgenstein: A Religious Point of View?*, p. 9.

Phillips' second criterion concerns the role prayer has in the lives of those who pray. If it is spoken and yet has little or no deep connection to (or perhaps it is better to talk about place in) the life of the believer; if, for example, it bears little relation to the believer's life before or after it has been uttered, then he doubts whether it is a prayer at all:

> One might put forward a general thesis that the more tenuous the relation between the prayer and the rest of the person's life, the more suspect the prayer becomes; the likelihood of superstition increases.[526]

If the prayer uttered has no relevance to or importance in, the life of the person who uttered it (the prayer must have importance in the person's life after he has uttered it[527]), then it is not properly religious, it isn't genuine prayer; if prayers have no deep meaning for him, 'These prayers are far nearer superstition: kissing a rabbit's foot or touching wood.'[528] This kind of prayer seems to be used as a tool only when one needs a result, without being important in itself. Its only purpose is to get the person who utters it what he wants. We should recall the sentence from Henry Churchill King: 'Nor are we to pray as a short cut to things, making prayer largely selfish and material.' [529] Here is another example that illustrates just what Phillips was getting at, from a Sufi, Sari:

> One day in Baghdad the central bazaar caught on fire. Someone came to me and told me that my store had been spared in the fire. I replied, "Praise be to God!" At that moment, I became ashamed before people for selfishly seeking

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[526] *The Concept of Prayer*, p. 115.
[527] '...unless prayers play a certain role in the person's life after the crisis is over, they are not characteristic of the *religious* role of prayer in the life of the believer.' (Ibid., p. 116.)
[528] Ibid., p. 116.
[529] *Difficulties Concerning Prayer II*, p. 282.

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my own advantage. Thirty years now I've been asking God to forgive me for once saying that "Praise be to God."[530]

Again, there is a disarming contrast between the attitude expressed here and in the Prince Albert example.[531] The man praying for his house to be spared, or thanking God when a storm subsides, while other villagers might have lost everything, seems to be thinking only of himself. It might be understandable why the Sufi storekeeper utters those words, but such selfishness, such vanity goes against his religion, is a sin; and from then on he only asks God to forgive him. The wife in saying 'I always feel grateful for it when I go to mass. When I die I feel that I'll be able to say "thank you" to God', is free from selfishness and vanity. Such examples do show, I think, that Phillips is, at the very least, not always wrong about what gives prayers their *power* and depth.[532]

But we might feel that we can criticise Phillips as we might criticise the scientists in the Prayer Gauge Debate. In dismissing certain prayers as being *simply* superstitious, he is, one might feel, cutting off further investigation, but more importantly, he is unfairly diminishing the importance, the power the prayers might have for believers, the role they play in their lives. Even if we are to call all prayers of a certain type 'superstitious', we *can't* leave it at that. But this is exactly what Phillips does. He doesn't place importance on distinguishing between different prayers of petition, for

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[530] Fadiman, James & Frager, Robert (eds.) *Essential Sufism.* San Francisco: Harper SanFrancisco, 1997, p. 175.

[531] The Sufi example is not too far from an example given by Phillips, who writes of a person who prays during a storm: "O God, don't let the lightning hit the house'. Sometimes, this almost seems to mean, 'Let the lightning hit someone else's house!' What is one to say about this kind of prayer? One can say that one does not like it, but that is neither here nor there. The prayer reveals the attitude of the person concerned to the way things go. It reveals little devotion, since if the house were hit, one could imagine the event resulting in a loss of faith. It is probable that the prayer is thought of as an attempt to influence God's directing of the lightning. If this is true, the prayer is superstition and nothing else.' (*The Concept of Prayer*, p. 118.)

[532] The following is from Matthew, Wittgenstein's favourite Gospel. 'Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.' (*Matthew* 7:21)

part of the importance of prayer depends on what is prayed for. We can appreciate why Phillips might be critical of a footballer's prayer to God before a game. But there is surely something very different about a mother who prays for her son's life to be spared. This might be superstition as it is understood by Phillips, but some might think that it should not always be considered *religiously* shallow (while allowing that Phillips cannot get along with it *as a philosopher*). Many might find Phillips' criticisms of serious examples distasteful. Think of the mother who prays for her dying son. After losing him she might ask why he had to die, whether she had prayed hard enough. Phillips allows that this might mean

> that the mother thought she had some measure of blame in the matter. Given, however, that the mother *does* believe that increased prayer would have saved her son, one must say that the prayer is superstition.[533]

The mother crying out to God might be expressing her confusion, her inability to take it in, to understand such a thing, even an assumption of guilt. But if we discover that the mother does think that more prayer would have saved her son, we might feel that we cannot, as Phillips did, leave it there. For *dismissing* all this as superstition, one is not really saying enough about it. For Phillips all superstition *is* shallow. When parents see that their child is dying, that the doctors can do nothing, if they utter a prayer that appears to be asking God to allow the child to live, this is superstition.

> What of parents who pray for a dying child, 'O God, don't let her die!'? If the prayer is not to be regarded as superstition, it cannot be thought of as an attempt to *influence* God to heal the child.[534]

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[533] *The Concept of Prayer*, p. 118.
[534] Ibid., p. 119.

The *religious* parents, however, are acknowledging their helplessness; that their child's fate is out of their hands.

> When deep religious believers pray *for* something, they are not so much asking God to bring this about, but in a way telling Him of the strength of their desires. They realize that things may not go as they wish, but they are asking to be able to go on living whatever happens.[535]

If the child, against all medical evidence recovers, the non-religious parents might thank God and perhaps think about this for a short time, consider themselves fortunate, claim it as a miracle and then get on with their lives. Why do they think their child was spared or why do they think that God spared the child?

> Does not the answer show that God has answered the petition? Certainly, but the *philosophical* question is about what it *means* to say that God has answered the petition. What then does it mean when parents pray after the child's recovery, 'We thank Thee for her recovery'?[536]

We can see that Phillips is right to say that prayers of thanksgiving and petition can be selfish, for one is often thinking about oneself when communicating with God. To be 'religious' here (as we have seen) is to approach prayer in a state of mind, of attention and reflection, where one is not concerned with the contingent events in life. Rush Rhees can help illuminate the sense of importance that Phillips places on approaching prayer in this way:

> It is a concern with life, not with one's lot. (Opposition to 'the world'.) Religious emphasis on what makes life worthwhile – something 'more' than the achievements of one's heart's desire. The latter hardly seems to have anything to do with it. What is important is one's relation to God. *What that is* can be

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[535] Ibid., p. 121.
[536] Ibid., p. 119.

explained only in religious terms: only in gratitude to God, in prayer, in devotion.[537]

This is where the force of Phillips' view lies. Importance is placed, in this understanding of what is *religious*, on how one approaches *God*. And what this means is how one lives, one's gratitude, acceptance of and concern for, all life, rather than concern for what happens in life. A religious fear of death, for example, is not a fear of losing everything; nor should it be a *fear* of dying, with all the horror and 'fear' that attends a nightmare that centres on death, of the fact that one will lose one's life. 'Fear of death in another sense than simply being afraid to die. A horse in an abattoir may fear death. But it does not lead to religious practices.'[538]

More philosophically problematic is his view that superstitious prayer is mistaken, confused. He is dismissive of the understanding that assumes God is a being who can, should He choose, intervene in the world; that there is a causal relation between prayer and God's intervention in the world, which is all very well, but he assumes that such an approach reduces prayer to a crude hypothesis. It is this view that I will be concentrating on for the remainder of the chapter. Like the early anthropologists and psychologists who were concerned with scientific respectability, Phillips too, in attempting a *philosophically* acceptable, respectable account of prayer, one that does not transgress nature, that does not attempt to *influence* God for favours, ignores certain religious considerations.

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[537] *Rush Rhees on Religion and Philosophy*, p. 64.
[538] Ibid., p. 63.

But first we should examine what the term 'superstition' is doing, what its role here is, and of what value it is to philosophical investigation. To begin with, because Phillips suggests that there are two criteria for a prayer to be superstitious, while rightly acknowledging that there is more to it than a simple factual error, he is saying that it is placing prayer in the realm of science, claiming that such prayers transgress scientific facts. Perhaps the most important *philosophical* difficulty that one can associate with its application here is that its use is pejorative. From Rush Rhees:

> I gather that to call a belief or practice 'superstition' is to say that it is objectionable; and this is partly, but not simply, because the belief is mistaken.[539]

This is Phillips' position. It is a mistake but not *simply* a mistake, it is not simply a 'factual' error; there are also certain moral issues surrounding it. But it *is* a mistake for Phillips, and he does appear to use the word to dismiss beliefs he thinks are confused. Brian Clack has picked up on this: 'In the absence of any positive category of 'the superstitious', we should be wise to avoid as much as possible, the use of the term.'[540] Phillips applies the term too quickly, without giving it the attention it deserves.[541] He does not seem to take into account the contexts in which the superstitions are found.

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[539] *Rush Rhees on Religion and Philosophy*, p. 112.
[540] *Wittgenstein, Frazer and Religion*, p. 123.
[541] The term 'superstition' is more problematic than Phillips thinks it is. Look, for example, at the origin of the term, which at least hints at something deeper than our ordinary understanding of it: 'The word superstition is derived from the Latin *superstitio* which means super, above, and *state*, to stand. (In the days of hand to hand fighting those who survived the conflict were known as 'superstites' –that is they were 'standing above' the slain.) From this has derived the meaning that it indicates standing over something in amazement.' (Haining, Peter. *Superstitions*. London: Treasure Press, 1991, p. 20.)

So, what are we to make of the notion that superstition is a mistake? Think of different examples of superstition. *I* would say that superstition is a mistake of sorts, but what kind of mistake? There is something very different about mistakes made within superstition when compared with other kinds of mistakes. We have to do more work here than Phillips has done; we have to look at the variety of superstitious practices and the contexts in which those who believe in such practices use them. Is it mistaken science or pseudo-science, a misunderstanding of nature, of religious belief? How close is *religious* superstition to other forms of superstition? Children can be superstitious. Think of this superstition: 'If you tread on a crack, or tread on a spout, it's a sure thing your mother will turn you out.'[542] It would be absurd to say that this is something like mistaken science and misleading to say that these are examples of *mistakes*.[543] Rush Rhees does not follow Wittgenstein here:[544] 'Superstition is something to which human beings fall prey. In this sense it is clearly not synonymous with 'pseudo-science'.'[545] People do not fall *prey* to mistaken scientific beliefs. To fall prey to something *might* not be a mistake.[546] One falls prey to neurosis, at times of stress or fear, perhaps. Fear takes one over, overcomes one's sense of proportion, balance. It is often so that a person cannot think clearly when under the influence of fear or worry. And it is *understandable* how this can be so. But superstition is not usually thought of as neurosis. And yet perhaps a comparison with neurosis is helpful. Cer-

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[542] Vyse, Stuart A. *Believing in Magic: The Psychology of Superstition*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 144.

[543] We should recall what Phillips has said on superstitious prayer: 'prayer can necessitate what is prayed for: if this, then that. This is an attempt to establish an analogy between prayer and a scientific experiment.' (*The Concept of Prayer*, p. 158.)

[544] 'Religious faith and superstition are quite different. One of them results from *fear* and is a sort of false science. The other is a trusting.' (*Culture and Value*, p. 72.)

[545] *Rush Rhees on Religion and Philosophy*, p. 115.

[546] If the belief that treading on a crack in the pavement is treated as something like a mistaken scientific belief, then how should one investigate it? Wouldn't an investigation into this belief be absurd? Rush Rhees seems to agree here: "If you bring hawthorn blossom into the house, it will bring bad luck'...it is hard to imagine two disputants collecting evidence which shows that it is really so or evidence which shows that it is really not so. I should hardly understand what was meant by 'evidence which would show that it is not so'. – And, by the way: it does not seem so plausible to say that *this* sort of superstition is going to be removed by the advance of science.' (Ibid., p. 114.)

tainly the idea of falling prey to superstition is less damning, *allows* more to be said, you are not closing down all avenues of investigation by judging it an error. From Howard Mounce: 'The mistake, one feels, is just too big to be a mistake at all.'[547] We might accept, from Wittgenstein, that superstition (at least in many cases) arises from fear (we fall prey to fear), but we should not then say it is a mistake in the sense that one might be mistaken if one thinks that the earth is flat (it can be proven that the earth is not flat). Praying to God for one's dying child, on the other hand, *is* different. Superstitions are often connected to important events in life (remember Phillips saying that prayers that have a tenuous connection to life are most likely to be superstitious), with marriage or death. On one's wedding day, if one sees an open grave it is a bad omen. If one meets a monk or a nun, then there will be no children. If one leaves a corpse's eyes open, he will find someone and take them with him. Now these examples certainly *appear* to be problematic in that what they seem to be saying is that if one event occurs then another will follow (and this is partly why Phillips rejects superstitious prayers). But looking more closely at what actually happens, one should see that if the individual, for example, has such superstitions and experiences an event that is supposed to have certain consequences, he might just become uneasy, or shrug his shoulders. Rarely would he be *convinced* that some event would follow (and even if he were convinced, could one say that it is a mistake in the way that Wittgenstein and Phillips see it? Again he is surely giving in to fear). From Howard Mounce:

> Married couples often feel upset at the loss of a wedding ring. This feeling, so far as I can see, is neither rational nor irrational. It is just the way that many people, at least, happen to feel.[548]

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[547] Mounce, Howard. 'Understanding a Primitive Society'. *Philosophy.*Vol. 48, No. 186 (October 1973), p. 353.
[548] Ibid., p. 353.

But this feeling can be taken too far, for one might begin to think: 'This is a bad sign. If we don't find that ring soon I'm sure something is going to go wrong with our marriage.' This, like the above examples, can be seen as being truly mistaken. To see things traditionally associated with bad omens do make one think, or feel uneasy. Again, one might feel this way without coming to definite conclusions about future events (a child after stepping on the cracks in the pavement might simply try again to avoid them. Here it is more like a game). Here,

> What one feels is that there is a certain craziness in this whole way of think-ing; what is believed is not a real possibility at all. This is why, if one catches oneself thinking in this way, one tells oneself not that one is mistaken but that one is being absurd.[549]

I think that this is important. One tells oneself that one is being *absurd*. This bears no relation to making a 'scientific' mistake. One is falling prey to fear; one should try and think clearly. Perhaps some superstitions should be seen as something like an ac-knowledgement of, or, more realistically, a reaction to the unpredictable course of life. A man loses the wedding ring and feels terribly worried about the marriage. There is a chance anyway, that the marriage could fall apart. Not because of the lost ring, but because that is the way life is. The husband might be insecure, deeply fearful of the marriage's future and underlying problems; neuroses might surface. The mother might be well aware that her child will die; perhaps she has always been unusually worried about her health. His fears and her prayers understood in this way show just how connected to people's lives, such superstitions can be. *Many* superstitions are trivial; many of those not connected to religion might be seen in this way: rubbing a

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[549] Ibid., p. 353.

rabbit's foot, for example, or wearing lucky underwear during a football match.[550] But Phillips appears to think that this action can be compared to (is as superstitious as) something more serious, such as a mother facing some terrible crisis. Can a child's fear of stepping on cracks be compared with the mother praying for her dying child? As we have seen, the former might be considered a sort of game, while a footballer wearing special underwear is concerned with the outcome of the game, which is not *that* important. The item of clothing is seen as a tool for getting a winning result. It has nothing to do with what is important in life. The child's fear is more serious, one feels, is closer to the fundamentals of his existence, concerns his insecurities, cannot be considered in this way. It is worth considering that what appears to be a trivial action might have deep meaning, a point which Phillips seems to ignore. Brian Clack agrees:

> The feeling that something important depends on the performance of something apparently insignificant is, as Chesterton urged, a feeling from the very depth of the human soul.[551]

The child's fear of stepping on cracks might be of great importance to *him*. This is likely to be linked to childhood fears, to his feelings about the world (it might offer a strange, primitive comfort, and who can say how this comes about?). To see these beliefs as *mistaken science* is to misunderstand them. But we simply cannot leave it there; a profound difficulty is present in what Clack says. I do have sympathy with his suggestion, but we need to ask what this 'feeling from the very depth of the human

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[550] But Phillips also talks of 'religiously damaging' superstitions: 'Think of the superstitious belief that sins can be washed away like dirt. Go into the holy river dirty at one end, and come up clean at the other. Swallow the wafer and be automatically cleansed of sin.[...].One can touch the magic charm, or swallow the magic wafer, whether one is unworthy or not: if it works it works.' He reminds us that 'The Roman Catholic Church has inveighed against mechanistic views of the Mass. Are we not told that 'he who eateth or drinketh unworthily heaps coals of fire on his head'?' (*D.Z. Phillips' Contemplative Philosophy of Religion*, p. 143.) The superstitions here are more like games, are extraordinarily trivial.
[551] *Wittgenstein, Frazer and Religion*, p. 122.

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soul' amounts to. It might *appear* to be the case that the feeling one gets has connections with something deep, but why might this not be mere illusion? For example, a manifestation of obsessive compulsive disorder could be that the sufferer feels that normally trivial, insignificant actions have 'deep' significance, that 'something important depends on the performance of something apparently insignificant.' We don't know why we have to close the cupboard fifteen times before going to bed, but we feel that this, apparently trivial act, has deeper connections to something that profoundly affects us, that will affect our future, though we have no clear explanation for this. We might be told that it is a disorder, a neurosis that can be cured, but at the time of affliction such explanations do not convince us to change our ways. We might even tell ourselves that it is madness, but we still go ahead and open and close the cupboard anyway. So the notion that what we are doing is important *might* be illusory. There are things that we do, act upon, for reasons that are difficult to elucidate, and these actions or thoughts can appear to be absurd. *Why* we say a notion is absurd is because it

> will not fit into the network of beliefs about the physical world which has been developed by western science and which has been taught to us since childhood; or rather, it does not even qualify as something which could possibly fit into such a network of beliefs.

And yet we do think about and hold such beliefs. Morbid superstitions might *arise* despite our clear understanding of how the physical world works. Mounce concludes here that

> What gives rise to these beliefs is not, for example, a deficiency in intellect, but certain tendencies or reactions which in connexion with certain deep hu-

man emotions such as love of a friend or fear of an enemy are likely to mislead us all.[552]

I do not think the Phillips pays enough attention to the different kinds of superstition to be found in life, although he has admitted that there *are* different kinds: 'all superstitions are not of the same kind.' What does he mean here?

> The belief of Welsh miners that not washing their backs protected them from rheumatism can conceivably be combated by medical means. No such course is open to one when faced with a belief that bringing hawthorn into the house is bad luck.[553]

But, of course, Phillips would say that they are both examples of confused beliefs. He is not saying anything new here, but elsewhere there is a certain ambivalence that was missing from *The Concept of Prayer*:

> But getting rid of superstition in our lives is not so easy. After all, aren't these tendencies still in ourselves? Don't we fool ourselves if we think we are free of them? Let me give you an example from my own experience. When I sat my first honours examination – in philosophy, of all things – I thought it had gone reasonably well. I happened to be wearing a certain coat and tie. I continued to wear that same coat and tie for the remainder of the examinations. Now, if you ask me whether wearing a certain coat and tie can affect the course of the examination, I should reply, 'Of course not'. I do not mean the suggestion is false. It is utterly meaningless. Yet I believed it. What does that mean?

He goes on:

> Well, not that I could tell you what the belief means. Believing is simply acting the way I did. We call the belief 'superstitious' because it does not fit in with our causal expectations. Yet it exerts a hold on us. We can all think of plenty of other examples: we touch wood, just in case; we're afraid of the dark; we travel with a St. Christopher; and so on.[554]

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[552] *Understanding a Primitive Society*, p. 356.
[553] *Religion and Friendly Fire*, p. 9.
[554] *From Fantasy to Faith*, p. 18.

He appears to have softened his view a little in *From Fantasy to Faith*; he is at least acknowledging that there are difficulties surrounding the use of the word that are not easily dealt with. And he goes on to point to a development that is of great philosophical importance for the philosopher when he is examining *religious* superstitions:

> So we are not free of superstitions. How much more susceptible primitive man must have been. Isn't the cry for God like a child's cry in the dark? When the world does not smile on us, isn't it tempting to invent a god who does? There is a great desire in us for some comfort which is beyond what we see about us. We postulate an order of beings beyond the skies, a dispensation beyond the visible dealings we have with each other. It is this postulation which, increasingly, has come under attack.[555]

What this last quote points to is an interesting aspect of Phillips approach, in which he emphasises the flaws inherent in the understandings of religious belief by thinkers and believers; those who seek easy answers in a comforting God, or who have no other conception of God but this one. Wittgenstein placed emphasis on philosophy ridding us of illusions. We can understand why people fall prey to fears; life, after all is unpredictable, and philosophers themselves are not immune from such fear. Phillips, however, objects to philosophers who, in their work, defend religious views that are superstitious. Those philosophers who defend such views are defending a position that is, for Phillips, repugnant. They are defending illusions, but for Phillips, it is not *just* harmless illusions that are being defended. They are defending lies.

> There is a religion of lies that is big business, and misuses the gift of life.[...].It tells people that all their dreams will come true. And when they do not, year after year, they are told that they will in God's good time. This religion of false consolation hides the precariousness of the gift of life, the fact that terrible things happens [sic] to human beings. Not much attention is paid to the prayers said *after* it is all too clear that what was requested in prayer *is not go-*

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[555] Ibid., p. 18.

ing to happen. These are prayers said to a Saviour who was acquainted with grief, and whose mother, for good reason, is called, Our Lady of Sorrows.[556]

The force of Phillips' approach comes through in such comments. Superstitious prayers or beliefs are religiously damaging. The believer's relationship with such a God can seem analogous to that between a child and his parents. The believer is like a child who needs his parents. The following chapter will focus on issues emerging from this 'religion of false consolation' that 'hides the precariousness of the gift of life.'

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[556] *D.Z. Phillips' Contemplative Philosophy of Religion,* p. 144.

Chapter 5

Phillips, Bergman and Bernanos

Introduction

So far I have been looking at what I think are some of the most problematic aspects of or issues surrounding, Phillips' philosophy of religion. As we have seen, much of the criticism of Phillips focuses on his adoption of terms and expressions from Wittgenstein. The implications of Wittgenstein's remark that philosophy 'leaves everything as it is' and the role of expressions such as 'description', 'grammatical investigation', 'depth grammar', 'language-games', and 'form of life', within Phillips' philosophy of religion, have long troubled critics. These expressions have, at the very least, confused commentators. Marcuse Wrote: 'Wittgenstein's assurance that philosophy 'leaves everything as it is' shows 'academic sado-masochism, self-humiliation, and self-denunciation...'[557] Of language-games, Ninian Smart wrote: 'Instead of serving any useful or enlightening purpose, it can only tend to confusion and obscurity.'[558] And Henry Leroy Finch contends that nothing from the later Wittgenstein 'is more difficult to understand and has given rise to more differences of interpretation that [sic] the concept of *forms of life*.'[559]Some of the most cutting criticism of Wittgenstein and Phillips comes from Brian Clack. Talking of description, he writes:

> the designation of something as 'superstitious' is not descriptive, but rather pejorative and evaluative, part of a project of *reform*, of elaborating a pure, 'true' form of religion. Such a project patently sits uneasily with the avowedly descriptive nature of Wittgensteinian philosophy of religion.[560]

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[557] *One Dimensional Man*, p. 173.
[558] *The Philosophy of Wittgenstein*, p. 47.
[559] *Wittgenstein: The later Philosophy*, p. 89.
[560] *Ars Disputandi*, p. 2.

Whether we agree with such criticisms or not, it is important to acknowledge that there are profound difficulties with the *detail* of Phillips' adoption of Wittgenstein's thinking. In this chapter I wish to highlight an aspect of Phillips' philosophy that has been ignored by commentators, but which I feel has great importance in how we approach religious expression.

In the last chapter I questioned whether it is acceptable to attack certain beliefs or practices as though they are founded on 'scientific' or conceptual mistakes. I suggested that there is often more to these 'confused' beliefs and practices than we might at first suppose. There might be connections to, or deep roles in, the lives of those who are involved in such practices, or who hold such beliefs. This criticism reflects my sympathy with those believers who pray for favours in the face of life's calamities. We might feel, for example, that Phillips is unfair to the mother who prays desperately for her dying child; we might feel that he dismisses her prayers too easily.

On *further reflection*, however, we might come to see that this reaction is premature. Phillips *might* understand only too clearly what the mother is doing; we have seen how important Phillips thinks it is for the philosopher to *understand* the believer *and* not take sides: 'If the philosopher wants to give an account of religion, he must pay attention to what the religious believers do and say.'[561] And we should remember that, for the Wittgensteinian, philosophy is not apologetics: 'Philosophy is neither for nor against religion.'[562] Phillips simply wants to look to the use of language, and point out confusion where it exists. I *was* impressed by this uncompromising characteristic of Phillips' method, for it allows an attitude of vigilance in the philosopher, and makes us aware that we need to resist the temptations to be found in the appearance or

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[561] *The Concept of Prayer*, p. 1.
[562] Ibid., p. 10.

surface grammar of language that can lead *to* confusion and misinterpretation (for both the Christian practitioner and the philosopher), and *away* from the clarity that does justice to what is being investigated.[563] I want to emphasise that it is this demand for clarity above all else that gives Phillips' vision its power.

But more needs to be done to draw out the importance of Phillips' approach. I want to show that it applies to many forms of human expression, especially those in which the written word has an important role. In particular I'm thinking of film and literature,[564] for where language is used there is a danger of 'bewitchment'. But perceptive philosophers of religion will be aware that religious understandings or beliefs expressed within film, for example, cannot be treated in *quite* the same way as those expressed within philosophy or religious texts and practices. For we not only have the expression of a religious position, but also the expression of it *through* the medium of film, through, for example, the words (or actions) of characters within the film. Such factors make this area of investigation philosophically interesting, for there are many temptations for the unwary.

We have seen how some philosophers have taken a narrow, restrictive view of religious belief. And of course, it is not just within philosophy that this narrowness can be found. I wish to discuss a piece that Phillips wrote on film to show the importance the Wittgensteinian method *can* have, if care is taken, in the way we think about what is said within an artistic context. I would like to look at a chapter he wrote in his *Through a Darkening Glass* on some of Ingmar Bergman's films. At first I had grave

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[563] 'What I have tried to do in my work in the philosophy of religion is to show that a sensibility should be possible there which does justice to both belief and atheism. Both are rescued from what philosophy tries to make of them.' (*Philosophy's Cool Place*, p. 163.)

[564] Phillips seems to have been drawn to discussing literature in particular. This is partly because religious issues are 'often stated more directly in literature than they are in contemporary philosophy of religion.' (*From Fantasy to Faith*, p. ix.) But also because (and we shall see this later in the chapter), thinking of the nature of literature, the portrayal of religion within literature is most explicitly related to life, that is to the lives of the characters. Of course, film is different, and is, generally speaking, not 'literary' in this sense. But there are exceptions, such as the films I shall be examining here.

reservations about what Phillips has done here. Many philosophers have a tendency to treat the medium of film as *philosophy*. Most commonly it is used as an 'underlabourer' for philosophy, to illustrate (usually well-worn) 'philosophical' ideas, but without paying enough attention to film as an *art-form*, to what it actually says, as film.[565] Film is often not philosophers' area of expertise, and the danger is that in their eagerness to do 'philosophy' they will misunderstand its nature.[566] One philosopher who falls prey to such a way of thinking[567] is George E. Lauder:

> The questions that Bergman asks are philosophical questions and so his films are a marriage of movies and metaphysics. My insistence that Bergman's films are filled with philosophy might be more clear if we recall what philosophy is.[...].Philosophy is never satisfied with descriptions or reports. Mere appearances cannot quell its hunger. Philosophy wants to dig as deeply as the human mind can probe and discover the meaning of life, death, God, freedom, love and indeed knowledge itself.[568]

He goes as far as to suggest that Bergman *is* a philosopher:

> With enormous skill Bergman filters his philosophy through film and his audience has an opportunity to experience in dramatic form the questions that preoccupy philosophers: Is there a God? Can we be certain that there is? If there is, why is God silent? What can we know? Can we love? What is death?[569]

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[565] Perhaps this is best illustrated by the recent interest in the *Matrix* film, which has tended to focus on the philosophical questions or problems to be found there; from the subject of whether experience is illusory, of 'sorting out the real from the unreal' to the 'the sceptical and moral problems introduced by the film.' (Grau, Christopher. *Philosophers Explore the Matrix*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 5.) These approaches tend to suggest a way of thinking about film that is often misleading. They encourage students to think about and judge films as vehicles for ideas, concepts familiar from undergraduate philosophy courses. I don't think that this is beneficial to either film or philosophy.

[566] There is, according to Birgitta Steen, a real 'ignorance of the film medium as a non-literary and non-verbal art form.' (Steene, Birgitta. About Bergman: Some Critical Responses to His films. *Cinema Journal*. Vol. 13, No. 2 (Spring 1974), p. 4.) And from Donald Richie: 'Once, when I asked Akira Kurosawa about the meaning of one of his films he answered: "If I could have said it in words, I would have — then I wouldn't have needed to make the picture.' Film should not be seen as a philosophical text. 'Kurosawa resisted intellectualization because he knew that cinema is not words. It is something else. It is this realization that makes great film directors and it is a strong disinclination to talk about "meaning" that makes honest ones.' (Richie, Donald. Review of 'Akira Kurosawa: Interviews' by Burt Cardello (ed.) *The Japan Times Online*: http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/fb20080113dr.html)

[567] I am aware that I am stating my position somewhat dogmatically. Phillips himself was unafraid of exposing bad philosophy for what it was. It is important to show just how intellectually impoverished such philosphical approaches can be.

[568] Lauder, Robert E. *God, Death, Love and Art*. New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1989, p. 33.

[569] Ibid., p. 34.

So it seems that Lauder, as a philosopher, places great emphasis on the 'philosophy' to be found within this director's work, and the way he writes shows that this is what he considers most important about the films.[570] It is clear that he thinks that Bergman has a philosophical voice that should be listened to, and that has had a profound effect on his own thinking.[571] I do not wish to spend much time attacking Lauder's position, but he typifies a tendency to view the director as an important voice in serious cinema simply on the grounds that he raises questions surrounding death or God.[572] It is tempting to be uncritical of what is said in Bergman films, just because he deals with these 'big questions' that many think belong to the philosophy of religion, or to religion itself. Of course, there is more to Bergman's work than posing or answering the questions of religious belief.[573] But if his work *is* seen as philosophy, then he will *not*

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[570] We can understand, from the above quotes, the conceptual framework Lauder is working within; we can see something of his understanding of religious belief. Elsewhere he is explicit: 'Philosophically, I am a theist. My view is that if the principle of sufficient reason is accepted then the existence of God can be proven. If every being must be intelligible either in itself or through another then the human mind must eventually affirm the existence of a Supreme being Who is the ultimate source of intelligibility in the universe. Though God is Mystery and we can not know *what* He is, I think we can know *that* He is.' (Ibid., p. 23.) We can see then, how very different his response to the films will be from Phillips' 'grammatical' reaction to the language used. We know, from this quote, that Lauder will not acknowledge and not even be aware, of his problem with the understanding of religion that is presented in these films.

[571] 'I have views on God, death, art and love that are quite different from Bergman's, but I think that viewing and reflecting on Bergman's films have greatly affected my philosophy of God, death, art and love.' (Ibid., p. 14.)

[572] 'Many writers have discussed Ingmar Bergman and his films exercised a particular fascination for those who sought a serious version of cinema away from the commercial environment of film-making and film-going. Bergman became a paragon of film art and of how the important questions of life should be asked.' (Cawkwell, Tim. *The Filmgoer's Guide to God*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2004, p. 8.) Bergman's 'seriousness' has worked for and against him. Many admire it, while some are repelled by it. Most problematic, perhaps is the perception of his work, especially that which deals with religious issues, as being the *pinnacle* of serious film, and as setting the standard for 'how' *the* important questions should be asked. This, it seems to me, is Lauder's position. What Phillips teaches us, is that he is not even asking the right questions.

[573] It is perhaps unfortunate that he seems to be known, among philosophers at least, as a filmmaker who 'deals' with questions that some consider to be philosophical, concerning the existence of God and so on. Why might this be so? His films, at their best, gain their force from the difficulties their characters have living fulfilling lives, for example. The so-called 'philosophical' issues that might be present in the films are not what we remember them for. But it is these that philosophers search for in his films.

be judged favourably: we should not be approaching his films as though they were the works of a philosopher.[574]

Blinded by his admiration for Bergman as a *thinker*, Lauder seems to praise him simply for introducing into his films themes that crop up within the philosophy of religion. His writings certainly reflect this attitude: they are largely exposition. He tries to articulate his admiration in philosophical terms and fails. I don't think that either film or philosophy comes out well from such an approach. We object to Lauder's exposition because there is nothing else to it, he hasn't done enough work as a philosopher on the films; and the films themselves do not come out very well from this, for considering them 'philosophically'[575] what they say is naive (what does Bergman *actually say* about the existence of God, or prayer?); there is a danger of underestimating Bergman as a *filmmaker*, if we pay too much attention to the 'philosophical questions' associated with his films. He *isn't* a philosopher and his films are not works of philosophy.

Philosophers, theologians and critics *have* had a lot to say about films directed by Bergman. Most notably they have been fascinated by *Through a Glass Darkly*, *Winter Light* and *The Silence*. Those familiar with these works will understand why this is so. The areas or issues they cover include the existence of God, human communication, love, God's 'silence', and the connection between religious belief and mental illness. Phillips' work shows us that there are difficulties with what Bergman has to say that

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[574] Other philosophers *do* make a distinction between Bergman the philosopher and academic philosophy: 'Being a humanistic philosopher and applied aesthetician, I sought in Bergman, as in other filmmakers that I have already written about, a mode of intellectual probing and penetration that seems to me clearly philosophical, though not the same as specialized investigations that belong to philosophy proper.' (Singer, Irving. *Ingmar Bergman, Cinematic Philosopher: Reflections on His Creativity*. Cambridge, Massachussetts: The MIT Press, 2007, p. 3.) This is still wholly unsatisfactory; there remains a desire to extract philosophy from the director's work but like many who see philosophy in his films, there seems to be no clear statement concerning *the nature* of philosophy or its role.

[575] Bergman is partly to blame here, of course. He is entering, to certain degree, philosophical debate. His films of this period say too much, are too directly concerned with issues of God's existence. I fail to see why this makes his films more 'serious' or important. His very best films avoid such talk altogether.

have been ignored because writers have been distracted by the subject matter of these films, by the fact that the director concerns himself with issues fundamental to the philosophy of religion. Phillips identifies these difficulties in part because of the grammatical confusions in the 'religious' language used in the films, and the implications of such confusions. I want to draw out the importance of Phillips' comments and to suggest that their importance lies in the way they deepen our *appreciation of works of art*.

Initially, the vitality of Phillips' comments appears to exist solely in his criticism of what he sees as Bergman's mistakes, or the narrowness of his understanding of religion. There is no doubt that this is what he *is* doing (and we have covered confusions concerning the grammar of religious belief elsewhere.) And this kind of attack is to be found in all his works. In itself it does not seem important, and, for those who are familiar with it, it may come across as clichéd, as offering us nothing original, as the same tiresome moves he has always made. But here his work not only exposes conceptual confusion, but encourages us to contemplate the connection between such confusion and what might be considered 'aesthetic' weaknesses of the films, allowing us a deeper appreciation of the works for what they are. The primary importance of Phillips' comments for the philosophy of film, is that in their uncompromising reflection on what is *said* within the films, they show us that we should not be seduced by the received notion of 'seriousness' that commentators repeatedly and uncritically ascribe to Bergman's work of this period.

What Phillips says is difficult, not simply because one implication (and this is partly what I want to get at) is that Bergman is in *error*, that the portrayal of religion is closer to (or has a closer connection to) superstition than religion, but also because his criticisms show the films to be rather less than 'true to life', and of course this

leads one to doubt their importance *as* films. So, are the aspects of these works that Phillips can't 'get along with' *philosophically*, damaging to the works themselves as films (can we separate such issues from 'aesthetic' issues)? This is a difficult question to answer with any certainty. To help clarify the matter, I want to compare Bergman's vision with that of a work that was a profound influence on his filmmaking at this stage of his career (in particular *Winter Light*), but which, I feel, is more successful as art *because* of its more convincing, *deeper* portrayal of religious belief. This is George Bernanos's novel, *The Diary of a Country Priest*.

I shall be concentrating on two films, *Through a Glass darkly* and *Winter Light*, and will move on to look at Bernanos's novel which, I suggest, avoids all the difficulties that Bergman's understanding of religion provides for Phillips. To emphasise the strengths of Phillips work here, I will be offering, as a contrast to his method of investigation, a piece written on the novel by a literary critic, Kathy Comfort, who does not pay attention to the use of language within the novel and thus completely misunderstands the nature of the religious expression to be found there.

Through a Glass Darkly is set on an island, in a house in which a famous writer, David, his two children, Minus and Karin and her Husband, Martin, a doctor, are holidaying. None of the characters are particularly stable or secure. Karin suffers from schizophrenia, while her father has cared more about his writing than his family. There is much painful criticism of the father, who is not only distant from his family, but also a detached observer of his daughter's advancing illness, and who, as a writer, coolly observes it, making notes in his diary for a later project. As the film progresses, we witness the manifestation of Karin's mental illness and the two realities which attract her: the 'real' world and the world of her madness. By the end of the film she has succumbed to the reality of her sickness and rejected the ordinary world.

In *Through a Darkening Glass*, Phillips takes his cue from the very brief preface, by Bergman himself, to the published screenplays of these films:[576] 'The theme of these three films is a 'reduction'- in the metaphysical sense of the word.'[577] It is this term that most interests Phillip.[578] He considers Bergman's portrayal of religion to be

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[576] All my quotes from the films will be taken from the published screenplays.

[577] Bergman, Ingmar. *A Film Trilogy*. London: Marion Boyars, 1989, p. 6.

[578] For Phillips, the term 'reductionism' , is used pejoratively to describe what happens when thinkers attempt to explain (or explain away) religious belief, where the philosophers attempt to give the fundamental, perhaps underlying, foundation of a thing or, as Phillips puts it, 'the real essence of a phenomenon'. It takes two broad forms. The first is a conscious reductionism, to be found in the writings on religion of those such as Frazer or Freud. These writers 'had the specific aim of reducing religious language to a terminology which enabled one to explain it away.' (*Religion Without Explanation*, p. 157.) The conscious reductionist considers religious beliefs to be mistaken, false, without factual basis; it has come about through error of some kind: 'it has been suggested that religion arose from fear and ignorance in the face of mystery; that religion arose from emotional stress or pressure. Recognizing the genesis of religious beliefs helps us to recognize the confusions involved in them. We can then reduce religion to the realities that give rise to it...' (Ibid., p. 139.) Once this is known, once we see this, we can understand religion. The conscious reductionist aims to show religion for what it is: an illusion, a fiction, emerging from fear, societal pressures and so on. Conscious reductionists always come to the same conclusion: 'At some stage or other they all attribute an error to the worshipper...' (Ibid., p. 85.)The unconscious reductionist, however, does not set out to explain away religion, but merely give an account of it. He does not set out to reduce religion to nothing, to explain it away, but in offering his account he leaves out crucial aspects of religious belief. On Phillips' view, he is reducing it to something that is not religion or at least that is an inadequate account of religion. But, according to Phillips,

reductionist, for while Bergman *thinks* he is offering a truthful account of religious belief, he is actually 'reducing' it to something that Phillips cannot accept, that he considers a confused, misleading portrayal of religious belief, something illusory that, in this case, emerges from the imagination of one who is insane. Watching the film, it soon becomes clear what it is about Bergman's understanding that leads Phillips to conclude it is reductionist. Here is Phillips describing a moment early on in the film, when the character, Karin, hears the sound of thunder:

> Here something is trying to break into Karin's world, but it is something alien, threatening. Yet, it is seen by her as a higher reality, one which could give sense to her life. All you have to do is to listen, open yourself up to it. There are echoes in this scene of the occult: a belief in a somewhere else, strange, fascinating, more real than anything we know.[579]

Phillips goes on:

> Bergman is depicting the inarticulate longing of madness. Yet, he is trading on wider associations. Karin, though mad, expresses a view of religion uncomfortably close to the conceptions of many who are not mad. The spiritual is equated with the uncanny.[580]

The first quote reflects the nature of the overall portrayal of religion in the film, and Phillips' reaction to this portrayal is what we would expect. Belief in God is understood in similar terms to mental illness, and is a grotesque illusion. Bergman uses the character of Karin to show this. Most unsettling, perhaps, is Karen's conviction about what is to happen. She is waiting, with absolute confidence, for something. She hears voices from behind the wall paper of her room, calling her. She discusses this with her brother, talking about 'him who is to come', and how she longs 'for that moment

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all these reductionists seem to end up with an understanding of belief that drains it of its relevance to life. The product of such approaches is an inadequate, flawed understanding of religion.

[579] Phillips, D.Z. *Through a Darkening Glass*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982, p. 136.
[580] Ibid., p. 137.

when the door will open and all faces are turned towards him who's to come.' When

her brother asks her who is to come, she replies: '...I believe God is going to reveal

himself to us. And he'll come in to us through that door.'[581] And from Phillips: 'In

this whole scene, the divine is characterized, not by its bearing on human life, but by

something which should be traceable to a strange source.' [582] Phillips sees this por-

trayal of God as little more than a portrayal of perverse superstition. There is a lack of

reflection here on the relation between a human being and God, Who has been re-

duced to a strange, sinister force, a monster that might exist in a child's imagination.

But some of the characters' understandings are not *meant* to be convincing. For ex-

ample, a little later on, Karin's father tells of his attempt at suicide. Out of that he

claims, came a feeling of love for his children and friend. But this love cannot be

taken too seriously considering his neglect of his children. 'The love is as magical as

the intentions; a short-cut which tries to avoid working through the difficulties.'[583]

But elsewhere Phillips is not convinced by what the director *wants* us to take seri-

ously. At one point in the film, Karin's brother calls on God:

*Minus rushes into his room and throws himself on his knees on the floor and
clasps his hands, bends his head and presses his hands to his lips.*
MINUS: (whispering): God...God...help us!
...Again and again he calls on God.[584]

Phillips' reaction to this is uncompromising: 'what is sought is again some kind of

magical intervention, some shortcut, which will make everything all right.'[585] Phillips

makes the point that 'Any name might have come to his lips', for it is the result of his

pleas that have importance, there is nothing *religious* (as Phillips understands the

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[581] *A Film Trilogy*, p. 42.
[582] *Through a Darkening Glass*, p. 139-140.
[583] Ibid., p. 142.
[584] Ibid., p. 142.
[585] *A Film Trilogy*, p. 50.

word) in his desperate cries for God's help. Bergman, however, shows that the trauma suffered by the boy changes his world view; he has left his childish self behind, and replaced it with insight:

> *From this moment on his senses will change and harden, his receptivity will become sharpened, as he goes from the make-believe world of innocence to the torment of insight. The world of contingency and chance has been transformed into a universe of law.*[586]

But Phillips is unimpressed:

> It must be said that these lavish words must be put on the same level as the good intentions, instant awareness of love, and the calling on God in a panic. They are words which want to convey an instant breakthrough in awareness in Minus, but there is nothing in the development of the character which merits these words.[587]

What Phillips notes is the lack of a convincing deep vision in the lives of those who experience such 'revelations'. The father's newfound feeling of love for his children, for example, is insincere, it is all talk. In *From Fantasy to Faith*, Phillips writes that 'There is no shortest way home to salvation, no short-cut which by-passes the mundane details of everyday life.' He goes on:

> But the 1960's was a decade of short-cuts, of instant answers, instant love which was supposed to provide instant solutions; instant love which in fact made instant millionaires:
>
> All you need is love
> Love, love, love
> Love is all you need.[588]

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[586] Ibid., p. 51.
[587] Ibid., p. 143.
[588] *From Fantasy to Faith*, p. 100.

It is tempting to confuse simplistic sloganeering, the utterance of words with a super-

ficial impact, with what has real importance in the lives of those who utter them. We

will see in this chapter, just how many easy solutions are sought in the works exam-

ined, and how many 'easy' interpretations are made.

Karin ultimately does see something coming out at her from the cupboard; she sees

God, but he is a spider God, a horrible vision, a terrible force.[589] This God cannot be

accepted, if one is to live well, and Karin is taken off to hospital at the end of the film,

her mental illness inextricably linked to her belief in God. It is almost, Phillips seems

to think, as if Bergman is saying that this notion of otherworldliness, this tormenting

God, this cruel God, is a world away from real insight, indeed, from 'reality'. The

world as it is. It is unhealthy and should be done away with if a person wants to de-

velop, mature. From Phillips:

> Here we have confirmation of the fact that although the spider god is a product
> of Karin's madness, Bergman is questioning the whole notion of a god who
> dwells in some other world conceived by analogy with this one; a god who
> may be strange but nevertheless a god who is an object among objects, a crea-
> ture among creatures, a something in the dark. If this is the only bearing relig-
> ion has on life, it is little more than the product of superstitious fear, the desire
> for magical solutions and trivial curiosity. Religion is little more than the oc-
> cult. Is this all religion can be?[590]

The notion of God has been reduced to that of an object among objects, something

'supernatural' as ghosts are supernatural, something frightening, 'otherworldly' as a

ghost might be otherworldly, that has, according to Phillips, little to do with life as it

is lived, that has no *real* bearing on how one lives. It comes about through fear; it is a

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[589] 'I was frightened. The door opened. But the god who came out was a spider. He had six legs and moved very fast across the floor. He came up to me and I saw his face, a loathsome, evil face. And he clambered up onto me and tried to force himself into me. But I protected myself. All the time I saw his eyes. They were old and calm. When he couldn't force himself into me, he climbed quickly up onto my breast and my face and went on up the wall. I've seen God.' (*A Film Trilogy*, p. 190.)
[590] *Through a Darkening Glass*, p.147.

problem, almost a form of depression, that one needs to escape from if one is to live a full and contented life. Here is Bergman's reductionism. Religion springs from desire and misplaced longing. And like all longing it is for the unattainable. The characters' attempts to get something different, to grasp an alternative understanding of God's importance[591] do not surprise Phillips, for these words, 'like those we have met at other points throughout the film, seek a magical solution, a shortcut which solves everything all at once.'[592] All this is a long way from Phillips' understanding of what is important about religion, what gives religion its distinctive character, its depth and power.

Winter Light is a better film, but just as problematic for Phillips. It takes place over a few hours one winter afternoon in an isolated church. It begins with a service given by the pastor, Tomas, to an almost empty church, with only nine parishioners in attendance. The pastor is sick, and the film, as it progresses, reveals his disintegrating faith in the light of certain events; most importantly a letter from his ex-mistress, Marta, and his inability to prevent a parishioner, Jonas Persson, from committing suicide. In the final shot of the film, the pastor is conducting a service with only Marta in the congregation.[593] The following is from the critic Phillip Mosley:

> The film traces the personal crisis of a doubting priest, Thomas Ericsson, from hypocritical habit to total disillusionment. His dilemma reflects Bergman's desire for a 'showdown with an old concept of God' and an attempt to

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[591] The most problematic example is to be found at the end of the film. Minus, having rejected the spider God of Karin's or God as an invisible force, asks his father for proof of God's existence. David gives his answer: 'It's written: *God is love.*' He goes on to describe that it is here that his hopes lie. And he is talking about '*Every* sort of love, Minus! The highest and the lowest, the poorest and the richest, the most ridiculous and the most sublime. The obsessive and the banal. All sorts of love,' (*A Film Trilogy*, p. 60.) This hope in a God of love is particularly worrying for Phillips: 'Is it a vague hope in some kind of ultimate compensation, a conviction that somehow everything will be all right' (*Through a Darkening Glass*, p. 149.)

[592] Ibid., p. 147.

[593] It was a variation on an idea which had often intrigued him: a parson would lock himself in his church and challenge God to confirm His presence, no matter how long it took. This, he thought, could have an infinite number of consequences, none of them conclusive.

'glimpse...a new, much more difficult to capture, difficult to explain, difficult to describe God.'[594]

Clearly the 'old concept of God', is of a being who is 'biblical', unloving and cruel, underpinned by the notion that it can intervene in the world, hear one's prayers and choose to answer or ignore them. This is the notion of God that Bergman once accepted, but now wants to purge himself of.[595] But again, Phillips reflects critically on what is said by the characters. In this film, Bergman 'is wanting to say that there is a senselessness which is integral to religious faith.'[596] It seems to Phillips that religious faith here (and this links it to *Through a Glass Darkly*) is 'the product of the neurotic and unloving elements of life.'[597] From the Pastor's housekeeper, Marta:

> I grew up in a non-Christian family, full of warmth and kindness and loyalty – and joy. God and Christ didn't exist, except as vague notions. And when I came into contact with your faith, it seemed to me obscure and neurotic...[598]

The pastor's understanding of religion is born of the director's own experiences:

> I and my God lived in one world, a specially arranged world, where everything made sense. All around were the agonies of real life. But I didn't see them. I turned my gaze toward my God.[599]

His God was one who intervened in the world, who saw that things worked out for the best; a loving, caring being who would look after him: 'A god who guaranteed me every imaginable security. Against fear of death. Against fear of life.'[600] One should

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[594] Mosley, Philip. *Ingmar Bergman: The Cinema as Mistress*. London: Marion Boyars, 1981, p. 107.
[595] Though of course, the *understanding* hasn't changed. He has just come to reject the God that fits into this conceptual framework.
[596] *Through a Darkening Glass*, p. 151.
[597] Ibid., p. 152.
[598] *A Film Trilogy*, p. 81.
[599] Ibid., p. 84.
[600] Ibid., p. 153.

emphasise that Phillips is very much in *agreement* with Bergman where he exposes, as he does here, what he calls 'the comforting picture of religious individualism' which, one might say, the film is in part a reaction against.[601] This position, that Bergman once held, is described by Phillips in *Religion without Explanation* as follows:

> There is a direct relationship between the believer and his personal Saviour. The believer who is saved has certainty in his heart.[...].He does not have to worry about what happens to personal relationships, the family, the society or the culture.[...].Is not heaven beyond the earth, and does not God in his Heaven see to it that the faith of the faithful is not frustrated?

And for Phillips, this

> is a picture which must be put aside. There is no necessity about the continued existence of Christianity.[...].There was a time before the existence of anything called a Christian culture, and there could be a time when it has disappeared from the face of the earth.[602]

We see in *Winter Light* a dying Christianity, a world of hollow sermons and empty churches, that comes directly from the filmmaker's experiences:

> So we drove about, looking at churches, my father and I. My father, as you probably know, was a clergyman-he knew all the Uppland churches like the back of his hand. We went to morning service in various places and were deeply impressed by the spiritual poverty of these churches, by the lack of any congregation and the miserable spiritual status of the clergy, the poverty of their sermons, and the nonchalance and indifference of the ritual.[603]

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[601] Mosley highlights the comforting picture of religious belief that has held the pastor captive since his early life and from which he is beginning to emerge. 'Since the death of his wife, Tomas has become increasingly insecure, introspective and obsessed with the past. He tells the suicidal fisherman, Jonas Persson, about his experience of the Spanish Civil War: 'I refused to accept reality. I and my God lived in one world, a specially arranged world, where everything made sense.' He remains the same thirty years later, still hiding behind the convenience of a faith that is slowly collapsing, exposing his loneliness, his bogus priesthood and his fear.' (*The Cinema as Mistress*, p.107.)

[602] *Belief, Change and Forms of Life*, p. 85.

[603] *Bergman on Bergman*, p.73.

The character of the pastor has something of this terrible indifference, this lack of energy, both in his character and in the approach he takes to his ministry. And we see early on in the film that he has nothing to say to his parishioners, and this is because he is *aware* that it is all an illusion, a *silly* illusion, and yet he is compelled to continue. From the opening service to the final sequence, the words uttered appear to have lost (or perhaps never had), any significance. This religion has nothing to say to life, especially to the life of the pastor. This is explicit in the scene where he meets with the suicidal fisherman, Persson, who, it is made clear, is a man in serious trouble, but of course the pastor is of little help. His words are empty, and he seems to lack the energy even to show sympathy. The best he can manage are insincere, hopelessly inadequate words, which the depressed man recognises for what they are:

TOMAS: We must trust in God.[...].We live our simple daily lives. And then some terrible piece of information forces itself into our secure, safe world. It's more than we can bear. The whole state of affairs is so overwhelming, God becomes so remote.[...].I feel so helpless. I don't know what to say. I understand your fear, God, how I understand it! But we must go on living.
JONAS: Why must we go on living?
TOMAS: Because we must. We have a responsibility
JONAS: You aren't well, Vicar, and I shouldn't sit here talking. Anyway we won't get anywhere.
TOMAS (*anxiously*): Yes! Let's talk to each other. Let's say whatever comes into our heads.
The fisherman looks at the vicar in astonishment, then slowly shakes his head. The pitying smile returns.[604]

The pastor, of course, wants to get across to Persson that one must trust in the God in whom he no longer believes, a God who will, ultimately, see that everything turns out for the best. We should trust in him as a child trusts in his parents. This is the picture of Christianity that Bergman is offering. There is nothing here to relate to the man's

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[604] *A Film Trilogy*, p. 74.

suffering, there is no connection, for the pastor, to the depressed man's life. *This* Christianity has nothing to say when faced with such difficulties. This is what, for the pastor and Bergman, religious belief is about. But it is a rather strange scene, because the pastor barely puts any effort into comforting the fisherman, so wrapped up is he in his own problems.[605] After Persson commits suicide, he goes to see the fisherman's widow. His state of mind is reflected in what he says: 'Your husband is dead, Mrs Persson. They've driven him to the infirmary, but there's nothing to be done. He shot himself.'[606] He asks whether she would like something read out of the Bible. She says she doesn't. Again, of what use is religion at a time like this? It can be of little comfort (or relevance) to the woman whose world has just fallen apart. Bergman shows us not simply the lessening importance of religious language-games in contemporary culture, but of religion as a whole. And it is not just within contemporary culture. He shows how it has less of a role, of an influence, in his own life. From Lauder:

> Though once God was at the centre of his cinema, both Bergman's films and his comments on those films reveal that, from a dominating presence, God has become a memory which, though it cannot be completely forgotten, is decidedly peripheral.[...].As God's presence dissolved the human person had to look elsewhere for some meaning in human existence, some hope to cling to in the face of death.[607]

We should remember that God was never really at the centre of his films. There is no God in Bergman's cinema. There was instead an illusory God, a fiction. And freeing himself from such a God, who is, after all, a monster (because he turns a blind eye to

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[605] The second time Persson comes to talk to the pastor, and after a few perfunctory questions, in an uncomfortable scene to watch, he can only talk about himself: 'Please, you *must* understand. I'm no good as a clergyman. I chose my calling because my mother and father were religious, pious, in a deep and natural way. Maybe I didn't really love them, but I wanted to please them. So I became a clergyman and believed in God. An improbably, entirely private, fatherly god. Who loved mankind, of course, but most of all me.' (Ibid., p. 84.)

[606] Ibid., p. 97.

[607] *God, Death, Art and Love*, p. 16.

human suffering and because he is a monstrous *illusion, a lie* perpetrated and supported by believers), man is free from the neurosis, the oppression that goes along with it. Religious belief is delusional, almost childish; something that man should discard if he is to have any chance of living a fulfilling, responsible life. This is perhaps what the pastor learns towards the end of the film.[608] It is interesting to note that the one character that Bergman wants to show as the best example of what a Christian *can be*, is the humble but efficient sexton Algot.[609] Always keeping an eye on the pastor, he shows concern and comforts him in his distress. Towards the end of the film, he tells the pastor that he had been reading the story of Christ's passion and thinking about what happened. He offers the suggestion that what people usually emphasise about Christ's last hours, the physical suffering, couldn't have been as terrible as the *mental* torture. He is thinking about the sense of abandonment here, from his torment at Gethsemane, to the final agony of the cross:

> When Christ had been nailed up on the cross and hung there in his torments, he cried out: "God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me." He cried out as loud as he possibly could. He thought his Father in Heaven had abandoned him. He believed everything he'd been preaching was a lie. The moments before he died, Christ was seized with a great doubt. Surely that must have been his monstrous suffering of all? I mean God's silence. Isn't that true, Vicar?[610]

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[608] But one wonders about the fate of the pastor. He sees through the lies, the illusions about his religion, but what does he do about it? And, while thinking along with Phillips here, we might say that the ultimate expression of conscious reductionism in the film can be seen in the character of Marta, the atheist and mistress of the pastor, who doesn't fool herself with Christian belief, who shares Bergman's understanding of Christianity as something neurotic, almost unhealthy. And yet, she herself is sick and unstable, her atheism has not freed her from her obsessions. Her physical disorders are surely psychosomatic. What can such freedom offer the pastor?

[609] His approach to life is revealed in this short dialogue with the pastor: 'I usually have time to switch on the bells, go up and light the candles and be back in good time to switch off again. Today I made a mess of it. A regrettable error. But the candles were new and hard to light! Presumably some fault from the factory. It's also conceivable my wretched body takes more and more time to carry out the simplest functions. But it's all one; if I may say so.' (*A Film Trilogy*, p. 100.) Bergman seems to want to present some ideal here, within the oppressive constraints of Christianity. He seems to be saying that religion is dreary, repressive and so on, but at the same time that he admires the humility and the ability to carry on despite everything, to be found in his characters. This view is expressed explicitly at the very end of the film.

[610] *A Film Trilogy*, p. 101.

These might be the words of a true Christian for Bergman, and yet we have the same understanding of religion that is expressed throughout the film, by *all* the characters. Even Christ, in Bergman's world, appears to have been misled by this picture of religion.[611] And of course, Phillips cannot accept any of it:

> Bergman has no other conception of the Passion to offer. It is the revelation of a mistake, the mistake of thinking that there is a compensating God. On this view, if there are no theodicies, nothing makes sense. The God to which David urged Minus to turn in *Through a Glass Darkly* was a God of love who would see that things go well.[612]

Again, as in much of his work, Phillips is *exposing* real weakness; the lack of awareness of other possibilities concerning how we think about Christianity, of the different ways of characterising the nature of Christianity, of what it is to believe and how it is expressed in (and relates to) one's life. Critics might reject the ending of *Through a Glass Darkly* as unconvincing, foolish, even,[613] but they tend to praise *Winter Light*. I have yet to come across a film critic who attacks the *understanding* of religion portrayed in the film. Look at this from Mosley:

> Winter Light is a remarkable film in two respects: it not only rejects, albeit tentatively, a belief in God's existence, for the first time in Bergman's career, but also perfects his exercise in 'minimal' cinema. It presents a far more convincing metaphysical reduction than its predecessor.

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[611] Commentators have talked about the 'ambiguity' within this film, and yet one might be justified in saying that there is too little ambivalence in his portrayal of Christianity (of course, critics talking about ambiguity in films, especially those with religious films, *really* mean negativity). It is shown as being a cold, unforgiving religion, with, as its foundation, a stupid lie. As such it comes across as being rather shallow, *lacking* the ambivalence that one finds in life, no matter how cruel a culture one is part of. We will see that this clear but inflexible vision compares unfavourably with that expressed in *The Diary of a Country Priest*.

[612] *Through a Darkening Glass*, p. 136.

[613] I suspect that this is simply because it jars, whatever one thinks about what is said; it comes across as being a little pat and not in keeping with the spirit of the rest of the film. So I do think that those who do dismiss the ending are not necessarily thinking of the unconvincing religious understanding that is reached.

He goes on to say that the film

> does radically further Bergman's theological debate, moving from grandiose, last ditch vindications of faith through agnostic non-commitment to atheistic despair.[614]

These comments are typical. They appear to engage with the 'religious' subject matter of the films, but what is more likely is that such commentators succumb to the temptation of uncritically accepting the conceptual framework within which the portrayal of religion in these films exists. Mosley here has nothing to add to Bergman's position; he is simply accepting common understandings of what might be considered philosophically problematic expressions such as 'metaphysical reduction', 'theological debate', 'faith', 'agnostic non-commitment', and so on, throwing them into his discussion because they seem to be appropriate, but more precision is needed if we are to avoid giving a misleading picture not only of what the films are about, but also of the nature of philosophical and theological discussion of such matters.

There is *always* a certain ambivalence in the reception of *Through a Glass Darkly* largely because of Bergman's widely known reservations about its conclusions.[615] And one cannot deny that its message is a difficult one to accept, and that it is a *difficult* film. In its own way, *Winter Light* is uncompromising, but what do I mean by 'difficult' here? Not the kind of difficulty that comes with offering a radical new understanding of Christianity or that might be associated with trying to go 'against the grain' in how one thinks about religious practices. From the critic, Gilbert Adair:

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[614] *The Cinema as Mistress*, p. 106.

[615] 'I collect a lot of material things around me and around them I build up an ideology. Afterwards I discover that it's all utterly crazy, simply doesn't fit together. That it only corresponds to a narrow segment of myself-a sort of groping backwards into the bourgeois world I'd grown up in, and which I'd been trying to recreate. But then I see it doesn't fit, won't work at all. The result is a deep disappointment, and the entire ideology collapses. And there I stand suddenly, with a huge superstructure and no ideology to bear it up. The result, obviously, is anxiety. There, I think, you have the exact reason why the intellectual content of *Through a Glass Darkly* collapsed. And why I carried the film through with such sullen obstinacy-a fierce effort of will, which is noticeable in the film.' (*Bergman on Bergman*, p. 167.)

Bergman, for example, is a very great director; yet not even his most devoted admirers can deny the faint but nagging resistance that must be overcome when one is about to plunge oneself into the world of one of his films.[616]

The difficulties one might have with *Winter Light* have something to do with the film's dourness, its gloom, which is unrelenting,[617] rather than because it challenges the audience to rethink their own beliefs, or presents an understanding that is difficult for them to accept. But one can't deny that there have been few films concerned with the issues covered in *Winter Light*.[618] 'There is probably no film author/director whose image is so connected with questions concerning the existence of God as Ingmar Bergman.' Lauder might well be right here.[619]

I suggest that Phillips, in doing what he has always done, has achieved something remarkable here in exposing very basic flaws in these works. Phillips does a good job on the films he discusses, even though he himself, no doubt, would acknowledge that the chapter in *Through a Darkening Glass* ranks among his minor philosophical achievements (as I have already emphasised, he is not doing anything new). I think, however, that ultimately Phillips' comments are important because the understandings

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[616] Adair, Gilbert. *Surfing the Zeitgeist*. London: Faber and Faber, 1997, p. 66.

[617] This from his then wife, Kabi Laretei: 'Yes Ingmar, it's a masterpiece; but it's a dreary masterpiece.' (*Bergman on Bergman*, p. 175.)

[618] Of course, we cannot ignore Woody Allen here, who accepts Bergman's view of God, *and* speaks of doubt in His existence in similar terms. Towards the end of his *Hannah and Her Sisters*, for example, his character considers suicide, unable to see the point of living in a Godless universe: '...I really hit bottom. You know, I just felt that in a Godless universe, I didn't want to go on living. Now I happen to own this rifle...which I loaded, believe it or not, and pressed it to my forehead. And I remember thinking, at the time, I'm gonna kill myself. Then I thought...what if I'm wrong? What if there is a God? I mean, after all, nobody really knows that.' (Allen, Woody. Hannah and her Sisters script at *http://www.imsdb.com/scripts/Hannah-and-Her-Sisters.html*) There must have been a feeling, even in 1962 that the subject matter of the film was a little out of date.

[619] Lauder does bring up the name of Robert Bresson : 'Robert Bresson's films are explorations of the mystery of God's grace and human freedom, and therefore the French director's films can be described as more God-centered than Bergman's. But in Bresson's films God is an implied presence, not a problem.' (*God, Death, Art and Love*, p. 59.) It is my view that Bresson's films are far more successful in their portrayal of Christianity *because* of this. He portrays Christianity from within Christianity. The characters do not question the existence of God because *his* world is a Christian world. I will come to this shortly when I examine Bernanos' novel.

that are given expression within the film *must* affect the film's worth. For while there is very controlled, very restrained, and thus powerful imagery throughout, the very narrow understanding of what it is to believe in God (and of what it is to doubt), for example, prevents one from accepting it as a true to life portrayal of a man in crisis, and from fully entering into the spirit of the film. Even those who are unfamiliar with Christianity, with religious expression, must have some doubts about the almost grotesquely negative view of religion that is shown in these films, the unrelenting horror of being a pastor within a cold, repressive religious culture, in an isolated church with a population of indifferent parishioners.[620] Many would have doubts concerning the nature of the pastor's agonies. There *is* something absurd about a pastor who would agonise over 'God's silence', in the sense that Bergman has Tomas agonise over it. The Diane Keaton character, a New York intellectual, in the film *Manhattan*, cutely expresses what some viewers might feel about it:

His view is so Scandinavian, it's bleak, my God, I mean all that Kierkegaard, right? Real adolescent, fashionable pessimism. I mean the silence, God's silence. Okay, okay, okay! I loved it when I was at Radcliffe, but I outgrew it.[...].It is the dignifying of one's psychological and sexual hang-ups by attaching them to these grandiose philosophical issues.[621]

One can imagine discussion in the seventies that saw Bergman's films in the light of certain philosophers. But the aligning of Bergman with philosophers is *always* troubling. *Winter Light* shows the lives of Christians who utter statements about issues surrounding their faith. Because they utter statements about religion or worry about death, it is all too easy to see them as philosophy. According to Birgitta Steene,

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[620] Although some critics' reactions are puzzling: 'His themes were reverting again and again to religion, a subject with which I have very little sympathy. Hence I was rather harsh on him as a philosopher, little realizing that I was criticizing interpretation of his films rather than the films themselves.' (Jarvie, Ian. *Philosophy of the Film*. New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1990, p. 316.)
[621] Allen, Woody. *Manhattan*. MGM, 1979.

More perhaps than any other film maker Bergman has suffered from non-cinema–orientated critics who approach his films as though they were Kierke-gaardian comments on the human condition.[622]

Scholarly work on the director reflects this:

> There have been more courses on the "films" of Ingmar Bergman in the relig-ion and philosophy departments of our American colleges and universities than in departments for cinema studies. As if this were not enough, Bergman has also been a staple in courses in various extension programs on Film and Women, Film and Literature, Film and Existentialism, etc. Such a consistent thematic approach to Bergman is doubly ironic when one stops to consider whether Bergman's originality has not first and foremost been that of a craftsman in the cinema world. If he is also a philosopher in the cinema, he is a philosopher with plagiarized views, personally important but culturally de-rivative.[623]

I feel, however, that something remains to be said of Phillips' approach. This is con-nected to my initial worries about what Phillips was doing in his examination of these films. I want to address criticism by Gary Comstock who concisely articulates what many might feel upon reading Phillips' chapter. Comstock states that Phillips does not 'reflect self-critically on the foundations of his judgements.'[624] But I feel he has mis-understood Phillips here. I think that he means that Phillips is judging Bergman harshly, looking at the films as though they were a single philosophical voice. There are criticisms that emerge from this. For example, 'Phillips equates the beliefs of one of the characters in a Bergman film with Bergman's own beliefs.'[625] He is referring here to the sexton, Algot Frovik, who comforts Tomas towards the end of the film. Here is Phillips: 'Bergman has no other conception of the Passion to offer. It is the

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[622] *Cinema Journal*, p. 3.
[623] Ibid., p. 4.
[624] Comstock, Gary. Review of 'Through a Darkening Glass: Philosophy, Literature, and Cultural Change' by D. Z. Phillips. *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 65, No. 2 (April 1985), p. 302.
[625] Ibid., p. 302.

revelation of a mistake, the mistake of thinking that there is a compensating God.'[626]

Comstock picks up on this.

> What Phillips has not considered here is the wider range of artistic techniques (e.g., tone, irony, plot) available to the filmmaker. An author or director employs many rhetorical strategies in making an object, the work of art. The work is always in some sense separate from its author's intentions once it is given to the world. It communicates its own intentions.[627]

Comstock makes interesting points that are worth discussing further. What strikes one as the film unfolds is that while there are not many characters in the film, we can say that Bergman's 'beliefs' (Comstock is being misleading. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the character *reflects* Bergman's views) are not confined to one character. Marta the atheist, clearly expresses something of Bergman's views, as does the main character, Tomas. Algot's character simply presents Bergman's understanding of an ideal Christian view. Algot isn't Bergman (and Phillips didn't say that he was), but what he says *clearly* comes from Bergman's understanding of what Christianity is. It is an expression of what he thinks is the best a Christian can be.

So I think Comstock misunderstands Phillips here; the above criticism appears to miss Phillips' point. But one can appreciate the view that Phillips is simply using Bergman to exercise his own very firmly held convictions; using a filmmaker who, even if he were capable of doing so, would probably have no interest in answering Phillips. And doesn't Phillips sometimes go too far? Doesn't his enthusiasm for engaging with problems to be found in various forms of expression sometimes narrow his own chances of fully appreciating what it is he is investigating? I think that Comstock's point is relevant here. In this film, one might say that the characters have a life

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[626] *Through a Darkening Glass*, p. 156.
[627] *The Journal of Religion*, p. 302.

of their own, that what they say comes from their own understanding of the world. And just as important as what the characters say and do, are the wintry landscapes, the careful use of sound, the role of light and shadow in evoking a world of icy repression. Phillips ignores all this and instead focuses on what the characters have to say because he thinks that what they have to say reflects Bergman's confused understanding of religion and the role it plays in life. But while one might feel that Phillips is missing something important about the film,[628] I don't think that there should be any doubt that the characters *are* articulating what the director wants to say, and that they do reflect his understanding of religion, which is what Phillips as a philosopher is interested in.

> I come from a world of conservative Christian thought. I've absorbed Christianity with my mother's milk. So it must be obvious that certain...archetypes, aren't they called-stick in one's mind, and that certain lines, certain courses of events, certain ways of behaving, become adequate symbols for what goes on in the Christian system of ideas.[629]

Bergman is also explicit about what he was attempting to do with *Winter Light*:

> It is a companion-piece to *Through a Glass Darkly*. An answer to it. When I wrote *Through a Glass Darkly*, I thought I had found a real proof of God's existence: God is love. All kinds of love are God, even perverted forms-and that proof of God's existence gave me great security...and I let the whole film work itself out in that proof of God, which formed the actual coda in the last movement. But I lost confidence in the idea even as I began to rehearse the film.

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[628] *Winter Light*, of course, is not simply about religion. The pastor's memories of his dead wife and his relationship with Marta, for example, are important and give the film much of its power. For Tim Cawkwell, 'The film is essentially a study of loneliness and the absence of faith it analyses is the incapacity of the pastor to love anyone living.' (*The Filmgoer's Guide to God*, p. 15.)
[629] *Bergman on Bergman*, p. 191.

Bergman goes on: 'Therefore I destroy that proof of god in this new film. A settling of accounts, in a way. I do away with God the Papa, the God of auto-suggestion, the security God.'[630] With *Winter Light* Bergman was getting religion out of *his* system.

> As the religious aspect of my existence was wiped out, life became much easier to live.[...].When my top-heavy religious superstructure collapsed, I also lost my inhibitions as a writer. Above all my fear of not keeping up with the times. In Winter Light I swept my house clean. Since then things have been quiet on that front.[631]

I think that *this* last point is something that Phillips does not allow for. We mustn't forget that there is no doubt concerning the origins of these two films, especially *Winter Light*: they came from Bergman's own experiences. The portrayals of religion that he gives in his semi-autobiographical films, are consistent with the views presented here. Can we say, for example, that Bergman is mistaken in his understanding of what religion is, what its role is? He might be mistaken in his understanding of religion (or of what religion *should* be), but it is not *merely* a mistake, it is something much more than this. One might say that it is his own tortured past, a life dominated by prejudice, even, that drives him; that makes such films what they are (that gives them their difficulty). Now, it might be said that Comstock is right to emphasise the different aspects that combine to make a film, but I think he ignores the fact that *Winter Light* is an expression of Bergman's religious views; and Phillips has always emphasised the importance of clarifying confusions to be found not only within philosophy but also within religious expression.

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[630] Sjoman, Vilgot. 'From "L 36": A Diary of Ingmar Bergman's "Winter Light"'. *Cinema Journal.* Vol. 13, No. 2 (Spring 1974), p. 35.
[631] Ibid., p. 219.

Phillips cannot accept Bergman's portrayal of religion, of what it is to believe in God. And, despite some reservations, I think that his criticisms have serious implications for the works he discusses. I now want to contrast Bergman's *Winter Light* with the Georges Bernanos novel *The Diary of a Country Priest*, a work the content of which would, I feel, please Phillips greatly and, in some sense, vindicate his approach to the Bergman films, for Bernanos' novel succeeds where *Winter Light* fails. A comparison of the two works shows the novel to be a more convincing portrayal of religion, while Bergman's efforts appear altogether more pretentious and shallow. The novel succeeds as art, because it gives a more convincing portrayal of what it is to be a Christian. I would also like to examine a paper, by Kathy Comfort, written on the novel, that offers an understanding of religion very close to Bergman's and that interprets the novel in the light of this understanding. She is led astray by the temptations religious language offers her, by the surface grammar of the language used, and because of this completely misinterprets the novel. I use this example to highlight the importance of the approach adopted by Phillips.

Phillips' writings on literature have been neglected by philosophers, but I feel that, at their best, they can offer interesting insights into the language used by authors and critics. I want to use them as a starting point for my investigation into the aspects of religious expression to be found in *The Diary of a Country Priest*. In *From Fantasy to Faith*, Phillips responds to shallow reactions to or interpretations of certain works of fiction. He objects to easy 'interpretations' that come from a lazy reading of language, from the critics' reaction to the surface grammar of the text. Of particular interest for Phillips are those who see connections to religion in literature. Many of

those who do are not paying close attention to the use of language, are not reflecting

on that use. Of *Waiting for Godot*, for example, he reflects on the question of why the

play has captured the imagination of so many theatre goers.

> Many glib answers have been given to this question; answers which roll off
> the tongue with an unearned ease; answers which create the illusion of under-
> standing where none is present.[632]

One glib answer suggests the play is an example

> of what has been unhelpfully called, The Theatre of the Absurd. Works which
> fall under this heading are supposed to show that life is meaningless. Life has
> become meaningless as a result of the realisation that there is no God.[633]

Discussing Kafka's *The Castle*, he suggests that many critics 'ignore Kafka's text.

They ignore what is evident in the novel.'[634] He attacks those who seek to find *God* in

the novel, who turn 'distant echoes into spiritual realities.'[635] There is a real problem

with interpretation: 'Religious interpreters have tried, with incredible desperation, to

find in all this a symbol of the incommensurability of God's laws with the laws of

man.'[636] Perhaps the major problem with interpretations of such books is 'a case of

theory determining the reading of the text.'[637] We will return to this but it is common,

perhaps natural, for students to read a novel in the light of their training, whatever an-

gle that gives them. In another chapter he discusses *The Old Man and the Sea*, arguing

against those critics who want to 'turn the story into a Christian fable.'[638] Many critics

'have seen in the Old Man's struggle with the fish a prototype of Christian disciple-

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[632] *From Fantasy to Faith*, p. 73.
[633] Ibid., p. 74.
[634] Ibid., p. 116.
[635] Ibid., p. 118.
[636] Ibid., p. 118.
[637] Ibid., p. 121.
[638] Ibid., p. 137.

ship, a voyage from hubris to humility.'[639] Despite the denial by the old man that he is

religious, critics have suggested that he is just this. And yet, 'His vocation, however,

is not that of the Christian. It is the vocation of a warrior, a hunter, put to the test in

deep waters.'[640] He brings in his views on prayer.

> Some critics have made much of the fact that the Old man prays to God in his struggle with the big fish. It is difficult to see why they do, since the prayers are of no religious significance, being little more that attempts to drive a cheap bargain.[641]

He goes on: 'Hemingway's story is not a Christian fable, and his old fisherman does

not come to a love of God's creatures. As we have seen, he returns home a hero and a

warrior: almost destroyed, but not defeated.'[642]

Phillips, in the above examples, wants to show how thinkers can be misled by lan-

guage to come to easy conclusions concerning religion and religious values. But what

of examples of religious expression where thinkers are misled by language into a con-

fused understanding of the *nature* of the religious expression that is presented to

them? We have seen how, in *Winter Light*, for example, there was a shallow, uncon-

vincing portrayal of Christianity. In that film there was no alternative offered. But it

was a portrayal that will fit into many peoples' received understanding of what Chris-

tianity is. Reactions to *The Diary of a Country Priest* have offered different interpreta-

tions, most of which, I suggest, do not pay enough attention to what is in the text, are

lazy *interpretations* of what commentators see before them. Critics see what is written

and because the language used appears to be familiar to them (the language used ap-

pears to be identical to that found in the Bergman film), the immediate impression

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[639] Ibid., p. 138.
[640] Ibid., p. 140.
[641] Ibid., p. 142.
[642] Ibid., p. 145.

they get is of a particular, and in this example, misleading sort. To this misleading impression they bring their own training. But it seems to me that many have a confused impression of what Christianity amounts to, and understand the novel in the light of this confused impression. I would like, therefore, to give an example of this kind of reaction.

The novel's subject is very close to *Winter Light* and it was one of the inspirations behind the film. Bergman said that he was 'tremendously fond of *The Diary of a Country Priest*, one of the most remarkable works ever made. My *Winter Light* was very much influenced by it.' More surprising, perhaps, is that he seems to have been more influenced by the book than by the film by Robert Bresson: 'I've seen the film seven or eight times, and it may well be that the film has influenced me too. But above all the book'[643] And yet, either Bergman was not interested in the understanding of religion offered here or he completely misunderstood the priest's suffering, and the nature of the Christianity portrayed, for none of the spirit of the book can be found in the film. How can this chasm in understanding be explained? I think that this question cannot be ignored, because it points to the crucial difficulty of the subject matter, and the caution with which philosophy *has* to approach it; but it highlights just why the approach taken by Phillips is *needed* and shows us where the importance of Wittgensteinian philosophy lies. But Bergman, if he did misunderstand the Bernanos novel, certainly wasn't alone in doing this. Kathy Comfort in her paper, *Imperiled Souls: Metaphorical Representations of Spiritual Confusion in George Bernanos's Journal D'un Cure De Campagne*, offers an understanding of prayer and religious doubt that is identical to that of Ingmar Bergman, but which is, I suggest, a world away from the true spirit of the novel.

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[643] *Bergman on Bergman*, p. 43.

One can't deny that there are striking similarities between *Winter Light* and *Diary of a Country Priest*. Both feature a priest in an isolated village; both are set in winter,[644] in churches with falling congregations, and apathetic parishioners,[645] and both men are surrounded by gossip about them (the pastor has his mistress, and the country priest is thought to be, among other things, an alcoholic). And there are certain scenes that might be compared.[646] Their lives are plagued by doubt about their 'faith' and their roles as priests. Most importantly, however, are similar phrases that appear in both works. An example of this is the notion of 'God's silence', which I shall come to shortly. Superficially, the two worlds depicted do seem to be the same; both use the language of Christianity in what appears to be similar ways, and place emphasis on the practice and ritual of the Christian life. For example, in both works prayer has a prominent role. But the understanding of what prayer is, of what it is *for* highlights the radical difference between the two. For this reason, the above comparisons are rather misleading, for while both works are set within the world of Christianity, the understandings of the Christian faith are worlds apart, and this is reflected in the attitudes of the two men at the heart of them. Right from the beginning of the novel we can see the difference, as the cure reveals his honesty, and in a sense, the sincerity of his Christianity:

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[644] Bergman uses the wintry landscape for a very different effect than that in the novel. It isn't 'used' in the novel, that is, it is not used as an 'effect' in the book. It would certainly come across as being a very crude, manipulative device if it was.

[645] Here is the country priest: 'My parish is bored stiff; no other word for it. Like so many others! We can see them being eaten up by boredom, and we can't do anything about it. Some day perhaps we shall catch it ourselves-become aware of the cancerous growth within us. You can keep going a long time with that in you.' (Bernanos, George. *The Diary of a Country Priest*. New York: Carroll & Graf, 1983, p. 1.)

[646] There is the priest's half-crazed discussion with Mme la Comtesse and the pastor's talk with the fisherman. Towards the end of the novel there is a conversation with his friend's mistress and this can be compared with the pastor's talk with the sexton.

When writing of oneself one should show no mercy. Yet why at the first attempt to discover one's own truth does all inner strength seem to melt away in floods of self-pity and tenderness and rising tears...[647]

Here we see something of the candour of the priest who writes in his diary without restraint. He is thirty years old, new to his parish and extremely sensitive (as we shall see, this sensitivity has been interpreted as depression). He is determined to attend to his ministry. But he is subject to the same strengths and weaknesses to be found in all people. His diary has much day to day detail of his fears of social errors. He is at all times plagued by doubt, often by trifling worries.

> I have been made to realize what a huge inordinate part of my life is taken up with the hundred and one little daily worries which at times I used to think I had shaken off for good. Of course Our Lord takes his share of all our troubles, even the paltriest, and scorns nothing...[648]

He worries that he is gaining too much comfort from his writing. And I think that this is a tremendously important thing to say. Unlike Tomas, the young priest is committed to his work, to his parish. But there is something intense about his commitment, that renders it disturbing and rather deeper than our understanding of commitment in ordinary circumstances:

> This morning I prayed hard for my parish, my poor parish, my first and perhaps my last, since I ask no better than to die here. My parish! The words can't even be spoken without a kind of soaring love.[...].But as yet the idea behind them is so confused...if only the good God would open my eyes and unseal my ears, so that I might behold the face of my parish and hear its voice. Probably that is asking too much. The face of my parish! The look in the eyes.[...].They must be gentle, suffering patient eyes. I feel they must be like mine when I cease struggling and let myself be borne along in the great invisible flux that sweeps us all, helter-skelter, the living and the dead, into the deep waters of eternity.[649]

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[647] *Diary of a Country Priest*, p. 8.
[648] Ibid., p. 24.
[649] Ibid., p. 28.

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His sincerity, his eagerness to fulfil his role, surprises and alarms (I think the sincerity

of the novel is revealed here). He is unlike and opposed to, those priests who, whether

through fear of exposing themselves to ridicule, or humiliation, stick to

> austere theological doctrine expressed in words so trite and hackneyed as to
> be certain of shocking nobody, and so colourless that at least they have the ad-
> vantage of making the listener too bored to attempt any satirical comment.[650]

The contrast with Tomas the pastor is all too clear. Although we hear no sermons

from the pastor, we can imagine that he would say just enough to get by, what he

would be expected to say, that his language *would be* hackneyed and tired. Bergman's

pastor is aware that the whole notion of God as a being who watches over us is an il-

lusion, and yet he still talks as though this were the only possibility for Christianity.

The priest in the Bernanos novel, however, is aware of this problem and the distance

that there is between such a view and a 'truly' Christian understanding. And this can

be seen in any number of passages. For example:

> Too often one would suppose, to hear us talk, that we Catholics preached a
> Spiritualists' Deity, some vague kind of Supreme Being in no way resembling
> the Risen Lord we have learnt to know as a marvellous and living friend, who
> suffers our pain, takes joy in our happiness will share our last hour and receive
> us into His arms, upon His heart.[651]

This kind of talk would be alien to Bergman's clergyman, who is cynical and whose

relationship with God was only ever neurotic; he has no real feeling for his faith, hav-

ing all but given up on life, and with little reason or wish to continue as a pastor. The

young priest, however, has a firm idea of what he has to do, a clear vision of his role

as a priest. Within him is a real Christian fire, but he is only too aware of the state of

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[650] Ibid., p. 26.
[651] Ibid., p. 27.

the parish and the parishioners, and of the work he has to do. Almost any quote can be used to illustrate the kind of person he is:

> I certainly seem to have lost weight enormously since the autumn, and people have ceased inquiring after my health, so I should think I must look worse each time they see me. Supposing I were not able to carry on! Somehow I can never quite believe that God will really employ me-to the utmost: make complete use of me as He does of the others. Every day I become more aware of my own ignorance in the most elementary details of everyday life, which everybody seems to know without having learnt them, by a sort of instinct.[652]

Despite his weaknesses, the priest is a man of God. Bergman's pastor, on the other hand, is clearly the creation of one who does not believe and who is hostile to religion. His fears, his faith, his understanding of prayer seem quite crude in this respect. But it is the description of prayer in *Winter Light* that is most revealing. In both works prayer has a prominent role. But the understanding of what prayer *is*, of what it is *for* highlights the radical difference between the two. In *Winter Light*, Marta the atheist and Tomas the Christian understand prayer as a way of getting something from God, of somehow communicating with God. It is accepted, for example, that one prays to ask God for something. Marta and Tomas both understand prayer in this way. In Marta's letter to Tomas, she talks in detail of prayer. Here she refers to her severe eczema:

> Suddenly, feeling angry with you, I asked you, out of sheer malice, about the efficacy of prayer, and whether you believed in it. Naturally, you replied you did. Maliciously, again, I asked whether you had prayed for my hands...[653]

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[652] Ibid., p. 32.
[653] *A Film Trilogy*, p. 80.

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She knew it was the type of question that went to the heart of Christianity. How can one, if a professed Christian, deny the efficacy of prayer? What else could the pastor say? Marta describes a prayer she uttered:

> God, I said to myself, why have you created me so eternally dissatisfied, so frightened, so bitter? Why must I understand how wretched I am, why have I got to suffer as in the hell of my own indifference? If there is a purpose in my suffering, then tell me what it is! [...]. Give me a meaning to my life, and I'll be your obedient slave.[...].This autumn I've realised my prayer has been heard. And here's your cue to laugh. I prayed for clarity of mind and I got it. I've realised I love you. I prayed for a task to apply my strength to, and got it, too. It's you.[654]

Tomas reveals, in his talk with the suicidal fisherman, what he thinks of prayer. He can't believe how absurd his delusions were: 'Can you imagine my prayers? To an echo-god who gave benign answers and reassuring blessings.'[655] The absurdity of prayer is all too clear for the Pastor, who now sees it as nothing more than a childish, crude superstition. Bergman's understanding of the role of prayer within Christianity is manifested in the anguish of his characters: Why doesn't God answer? Where is he when I need Him? See how much I suffer! Why don't you help me? But the characters are very selfish and I think that this comes across too in their anguished cries. We only need to look at the young, inexperienced priest's approach, to see the marked contrast between the two ways of thinking about prayer. He worries about *how* he prays, why he *can't* pray, his *ability* to pray, his *fitness* before God. Bergman's anguish would be alien to the spirit of the Bernanos novel, it would certainly strike the priest as utterly foreign and absurd. The young priest writes about prayer with some frequency, and here, in an important passage, tells us something about it, and reveals something about himself:

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[654] Ibid., p. 82.
[655] Ibid., p. 85.

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The usual notion of prayer is so absurd. How can those who know nothing about it, who pray little or not at all, dare speak so frivolously of prayer? A Carthusian, a Trappist will work for years to make himself a man of prayer, and then any fool who comes along sets himself up as judge of this lifelong effort. If it were really what they suppose, a kind of chatter, the dialogue of a madman with his shadow, or even less-a vain and superstitious sort of petition to be given the good things of this world, how could innumerable people find until their dying day, I won't even say such great 'comfort'- since they put no faith in the solace of the senses-but sheer, robust, vigorous, abundant joy in prayer? Oh, of course 'suggestion,' say the scientists. Certainly they can never have known old monks, wise, shrewd, unerring in judgement, and yet aglow with passionate insight, so very tender in their humanity.[656]

One wonders whether he would recognize the pastor's attitude towards prayer as Christian. The doubts and fears about the priest's ability to pray might be said to be *religious* doubts and fears, that concern his own standing before God, his own failures as a priest (contrasting with the pastor's selfish, unhappy prayers):

For weeks I had not prayed, had not been able to pray. Unable? Who knows? That supreme grace has got to be earned like any other, and I no doubt had ceased to merit it. And so at last God had withdrawn Himself from me-of this at any rate I am sure. From that instant I was as nothing, and yet I kept it to myself! Worse still: I gloried in my secrecy. I thought of it as fine, heroic.[657]

Prayer is not something that comes easily to the priest:

Another horrible night, sleep interspersed with evil dreams. It was raining so hard that I couldn't venture into the church. Never have I made such efforts to pray, at first calmly and steadily, then with a kind of savage, concentrated violence, till at last, having struggled back into calm with a huge effort, I persisted, almost desperately (desperately! How horrible it sounds!) in a sheer transport of will which set me shuddering with anguish.[658]

Thinking about the priest's thoughts, his fears, anxieties, his inability to pray, I recall a statement that I have used previously in this thesis, from Phillips: 'When deep be-

[656] Ibid., p. 104.
[657] Ibid., p. 141.
[658] Ibid., p. 103.

lievers pray for something, they are no so much asking God to bring this about, but in a way telling Him of the strength of their desires.'[659] There seems to be something of Phillips' 'easy shortcut' in the notion of simply kneeling beside the bed and saying a few simple prayers, speaking to God as a child would speak to Him. The pastor and Marta say prayers that are *easy* to say, the kind of prayers that children say. And their idea of God is childish, lacks a certain maturity that one would *think* comes with experience. Of course, the subject matter is difficult, their desperation is very real.

And yet, there is something very strange and disturbing about the priest's efforts to pray. It is very difficult for one outside the tradition to fully appreciate what he is going through. But while we might not fully understand the nature, or the grammar of the priest's prayers, we can see how different they are from the most commonly understood notions of prayer. The priest is not asking God to bring something about, he is not praying *for* anything. He appears to be avoiding the superstitious prayer that Phillips feels is not truly religious. This is implied at certain points in the novel. For example, this, from the priest: 'I know, of course, that the wish to pray is a prayer in itself, that God can ask no more than that of us.'[660] We can see that the actual act of prayer is not here characterised as incantation, it is about *telling* God something. We are never told what the content of the priest's prayer is, apart from, perhaps, this moment:

> Yes, I pray badly and not enough. Almost every day after mass I have to interrupt my act of thanksgiving to see some parishioner-usually ailing and asking for medicine.[661]

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[659] *The Concept of Prayer*, p. 121.
[660] *The Diary of a Country Priest*, p. 103.
[661] Ibid., p. 102.

His act of *thanksgiving*. It would be hard to imagine Bergman's pastor offering thanks
to God, for God had never answered his prayers. And, of course, there is no further
elaboration on the nature of this thanksgiving. This, after all, is a novel, and not a
work of theology.[662]

Bergman's conception of prayer simply does not allow for deeper possibilities.
And, of course, it is understandable why this is so. From Phillips: 'What eludes us is
the grammar of the concept; we find it difficult to give an account of it.'[663] We will
come to another example of confusion in a moment, but it is clear that the temptation
to react to the surface grammar of religious statements is very strong indeed:

> Prayer cannot be understood as praying to someone 'out there' who is 'there'
> in the way in which the planets are 'there'. On the other hand, the hold of the
> image is a strong one; the picture which holds us captive is persuasive. This is
> due partly to the fact that no matter how he explains it, it is essential for the
> believer to assert that he talks to someone other than himself when he prays.[664]

Bergman, it might be said, misunderstands the grammar of prayer as it is used in the
novel, despite having read it many times before making the film. It is important to
note that Bergman is not alone in misunderstanding the novel.

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[662] This is an important point, and one which Bernanos himself stressed: 'I have already written, on
this subject, that I refused the name of Catholic novelist, that I was a Catholic who writes novels, noth-
ing more, nothing less. What would be the value tomorrow, for unbelievers, of our feeble testimony, if
it were proved that a Christian is never Christian enough to be one naturally, as if in spite of himself,
in his work? If you cannot without effort and grimaces reconcile your faith and your art, don't force it,
keep silent[...]All the gold in the world cannot buy the testimony of a free man.' (Recvk, Rima Drell.
'George Bernanos: a Novelist and His Art'. *The French Review*. Vol. 38, No. 5 (April 1965), p. 626.
[663] *The Concept of Prayer*, p. 43.
[664] Ibid., p. 41.

I now want to look at the article written by Kathy Comfort, which, I suggest, *com-pletely* misunderstands the subtleties of grammar to be found in the novel. I am using this article, partly at least, as a means of *defending* Phillips' approach, which *aims* to do nothing more than reveal what is actually said, rather than offering 'interpreta-tions'[665] in the light of one's own interests or field of speciality. The opening para-graph of her essay shows that Comfort does just this:

> To a large extent, George Bernanos's *Journal d'un Cure de Campagne* is an allegory for the difficulty the devout may have in maintaining their spirituality in modern society. The novel's protagonist, the Cure d'Ambricout, a young priest in his first parish, must confront the spiritual distress of his flock while himself struggling with a loss of faith. His situation is further complicated by the debilitating physiological symptoms produced by an undiagnosed gastric tumor. The diary is essentially the priest's attempt to cure himself of his in-ability to pray, a sort of 'examen de conscience'.[...].In fact, he believes that his spiritual questioning and his inability to pray threaten his immortal soul, and these negative feelings culminate in the belief that "Dieu me voit et me juge" ("God sees me and judges me")[666]

Comfort here reveals her understanding of what the Cure's difficulties amount to. He must minister to the spiritual needs of his parishioners while 'struggling with a loss of faith'. He is writing his diary to cure his 'inability to pray', and it is this, together with his 'spiritual questioning' that he thinks turns God against him, lessens his chances of making it to heaven. We can see that if this interpretation is correct, then it does cover

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[665] The example might seem like an extreme case, but again it seems clear that to be an academic is no guarantee of insight, or rather of being able to give the right kind of attention to a work of fiction. Phillips' *aim* of clarifying, of identifying confusion is, I suggest, rarer than it should be. Saul Bellow agrees: 'I often think there is more hope for the young worker who picks up a copy of Faulkner or Melville or Tolstoy from the rack in the drugstore than there is for the B.A. who has had the same writers "interpreted" for him by his teachers and can tell you, or thinks he can, what Ahab's harpoon symbolizes or what Christian symbols there are in *Light in August*.' (Bellow, Saul. *It All Adds Up*. Penguin: New York, 1995, p. 76.)

[666] Comfort, Kathy. 'Imperiled Souls: Metaphorical Representations of Spiritual Confusion in George Bernanos's Journal D'un Cure de Campagne'. *Renascence*. (Autumn 2004), p. 1. Housed at: http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3777/is_200410/ai_n9473539/

the same spiritual territory as *Winter Light*. But I want to show that this is a perfect

example of the 'shabby'[667] thinking that Phillips emphasises. From the beginning of

her piece there are problems with Comfort's interpretation, but she does notice the

importance placed on prayer:

> It is clear from the outset that the Cure d'Ambricourt's inability to pray is the
> primary source of his psychological anguish. This devotional shortcoming is
> especially distressing in that prayer is ostensibly the principal occupation for
> one of his calling. The protagonist/narrator feels that his prayers are not heard,
> and his belief that God has abandoned him in turn impedes his desire and ca-
> pacity to pray ("A mad rush of thoughts, words, images. In my soul nothing.
> God is silent. Silence.")[668]

The final sentence shows the lack of reflection on the part of Comfort. Again we see

the understanding of prayer that places it within the conceptual framework that Phil-

lips urges us to resist:

> It seems that as a result of the prayer, God brings about *this* rather than *that*. If
> we admit this, must we not say that the relation between prayer and God, or
> between God and the world, is causal, and that prayer is a way of getting
> things done?[669]

And, of course, Comfort is not alone in such interpretation. Michael O'Dwyer, ac-

cepts that the Cure feels that he has been abandoned by God:

> The experience of Gethsemane , or the sense of total solitude or the suffering
> of the soul abandoned by god feature prominently in his novels. The Cure de
> Torcy in his Diary of a Country priest, for example states that he always finds
> himself in the Garden of Olives. This is the drama of Christian life at its most
> intense, the abandonment of the soul by a loving God and the consequent ex-
> perience of silence and emptiness.[670]

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[667] See *From Fantasy to Faith*.
[668] *Imperiled Souls*, p. 2.
[669] *The Concept of Prayer*, p. 112.
[670] O'dwyer, Michael. *Literature and Spirituality*. Housed at:
http://www.gerardmanleyhopkins.org/lectures_2003/literature_and_spirituality.html

Elsa Vineberg, too, talks of an absent God:

> It quickly becomes apparent that God is absent from the Priest's life as well as from his journal. Unable to communicate directly with God, he introduces various intermediaries whose unavowed purpose is undoubtedly to fill the void which separates him from the Deity.[...].Given the absence of divine intervention and the priest's inability to pray, the journal ceases to be a conversation with God and becomes, instead a replacement for prayer. With whom does the priest converse then? Simply with himself?[671]

There are problems with what Comfort says in almost every sentence. She writes, for example, that

> Despairing of ever establishing contact with God, he writes of forcing himself to pray.[...].Caught in what is best termed a vicious circle, the Cure d'Ambricourt cannot bring himself to pray because he does not believe that his prayers are heard. His inability to pray engenders a loss of faith that puts him in a state of sin, the antidote for which is prayer.[672]

To begin with we need to correct Comfort's understanding of the role God plays in the life of the priest. The most obvious manifestation of her misunderstanding is her claim that he 'does not believe that his prayers are heard.' And that this is the reason why he cannot pray. Apart from the fact that this is a profound mistake, we must ask where in the story does the priest think that his prayers have not been heard, or even that it is in the nature of prayers that they can or cannot be heard in the manner in which Comfort thinks they are? Of course, she has been tripped up by the use of language. All the errors in her dissection of the novel can be traced to this. We should note that Phillips' approach avoids such problems altogether when he examines the Bergman films as a *philosopher*. As a philosopher, his only ambition is to clarify what is really being said, to see how the language is really being used (the depth grammar).

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[671] Vineberg, Elsa. 'Journal d'un Cure de Campagne: A Psychoanalytic Reading'. *MLN*. Vol. 92, No. 4 (May 1977), p. 826.
[672] *Imperiled Souls*, p. 2.

And he sees from this that the understanding of various religious concepts and prac-

tices are not satisfactory, the grammar is left wanting, the moves made within the

various language-games do not make sense. This approach, then, has radically differ-

ent aims than Comfort's more assertive, conventional approach.

Part of Comfort's difficulties stem from the fact that she *interprets* the priest's

words in the light of her understanding of what it means to be Christian. She under-

stands prayer as an act of direct communication with God, who can hear the prayers

and react to them if He so chooses. For Comfort, God is not listening to the Cure or

does not answer his prayers. This is related to something that I think was lifted from

the novel and used to great effect by Bergman. The concept I am referring to here is

that of 'God's silence'. To begin with, I think that we should look at Bergman's use of

it. This, from the sexton's dialogue at the end of the film, when he is comforting

Tomas: 'The moments before he died, Christ was seized with a great doubt. Surely

that must have been his monstrous suffering of all? I mean God's silence.'[673] And ear-

lier in the film in a short but important conversation between Tomas and Marta, it is

used quite cleverly:

MARTA: What is it, Tomas?
TOMAS: To you, nothing.
MARTA: Tell me, even do.
TOMAS: God's silence.
MARTA (wonderingly): God's silence.
TOMAS: Yes. (Long pause) God's silence.[674]

And later Marta makes fun of him over this: 'Sometimes I think you're the limit!

God's silence, God doesn't speak. God hasn't ever spoken because God doesn't exist.

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[673] *A Film Trilogy*, p. 101.
[674] Ibid., p. 76.

It's all so unusually, horribly simple.'[675] This, of course, is an understanding that is no more than superstition for Phillips. The choice seems to be between a God who could answer prayers if he wanted to, but doesn't, and a God who can't answer prayers because he doesn't exist. But we should look at how the notion of a silent God is used in the novel. The term 'silence' is used several times in relation to God, with slightly different meanings. We have that quoted and misunderstood by Comfort: 'A mad rush of thoughts, words, images. In my soul nothing. God is silent. Silence.'[676] Now she, as we have seen, thinks that 'The protagonist/ narrator feels that his prayers are not heard, and his belief that God has abandoned him in turn impedes his desire and capacity to pray.' This understanding, identical to that of Bergman, expressed through the sexton, *cannot* be right, for the simple reason that it does not fit into the context of the Cure's beliefs, of what he writes in his diary entries. Another example is as follows: 'The old silence had returned to me. The blessed quiet wherein the voice of God can be heard-God will speak...'[677] Of course, the latter example is rather different, but nevertheless it has connections with the earlier comment. Here at least we can see something that Comfort has missed, the quiet in which we *can* hear God. It does seem that following the surface grammar of what is said, that the priest's anguish in the first quote relates to God not answering his cries. But it is absurd of Comfort to suggest that he thinks his prayers have not been heard and that God has abandoned him. There is no evidence in the novel that this is so. To begin with he is quite clear here: '...when has any man of prayer told us that prayer had failed him?'[678] The priest is finding it very difficult to pray, and we might find both the nature of his prayer and the reasons why he is finding it difficult, somewhat elusive. Perhaps this is why Com-

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[675] Ibid., p. 78.
[676] *The Diary of a Country Priest*, p. 127.
[677] Ibid., p. 134.
[678] Ibid., p. 105.

fort appears to place great importance on *explaining* why the priest is finding it diffi-

cult to pray. She writes:

> Caught in what is best termed a vicious circle, the Cure d'Ambricourt cannot
> bring himself to pray because he does not believe that his prayers are heard.
> His inability to pray engenders a loss of faith that puts him in a state of sin, the
> antidote to which is prayer.[679]

Comfort goes on to suggest that the priest is suffering from depression. 'His inability

to pray which, to his mind, is proof of God's indifference, triggers his depression.'

And yet, for me, there is nothing that indicates he is depressed.[680] And there is nothing

to indicate that God is indifferent. The interpretation that claims that God does not

answer the priest's prayers, is silent in this respect, appears to be inconsistent with

both the priest's understanding of Christianity and out of place when we consider the

spirit of the novel. 'Inability to pray', the silence of God, the 'loss of faith' are given

mistaken interpretations, which, I suggest, were not part of the author's intention, and

which are foolish even to entertain. Take the notion of 'loss of faith'. The priest is ex-

plicit here:

> No, I have not lost my faith. The expression 'to lose one's faith,' as one might
> a purse or a ring of keys, has always seemed to me rather foolish. It must be
> one of those sayings of *bourgeois* piety, a legacy of those wretched priests
> who talked so much.
>   Faith is not a thing which one 'loses,' we merely cease to shape our lives
> by it. That is why old-fashioned confessors are not far wrong in showing a cer-
> tain amount of scepticism when dealing with 'intellectual crises,' doubtless far
> more rare than people imagine...[681]

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[679] *Imperiled Souls*, p. 2.
[680] I am reminded of Allan Bloom's criticism of contemporary students who, he thinks, 'have only pop psychology to tell them what people are like, and the range of their motives.' (Bloom, Allan. *The Closing of the American Mind*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987, p. 84.)
[681] Ibid., p. 122.

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One wonders what Comfort made of this. In a crucial scene the priest confronts the local countess, who is profoundly tortured by the death, many years before, of her son. During the exchange he comes out with the following:

> Hell is not to love any more. As long as we remain in this life we can still deceive ourselves, think that we love by our own will, that we love independently of God. But we're like madmen stretching our hands to clasp the moon reflected in the water. [682]

This, from Comfort, is strangely mirroring Bergman's portrayal of the pastor in *Winter Light*:

> In pronouncing these words, the priest verbalizes his own belief that God does not hear his pleas. Nonetheless, despite his own confused faith, he is able to muster the courage to invoke church teaching for the sake of his tortured parishioner. [683]

This, surely, would be hypocrisy had he lost his faith in God, and is exactly what the pastor does in his attempts to comfort the depressed fisherman. Again, Comfort seems to be interpreting the priest's words to fit her own understanding of what religion is, of what it *has* to be, with little evidence that she has been paying attention to what is actually said in the novel. And her understanding of the priest is here no different from how Bergman sees his pastor. Both have lost their way, and just as the pastor utters the words of the service at the beginning and end of the film, and attempts to comfort the suicidal fisherman, the priest, according to Comfort, *courageously* speaks the words of a Christianity he is now unsure about. One wonders what kind of courage is required to do this. Besides, it is difficult to accept the notion that one can be confused in one's faith. What does this mean? I want to come back to this in a mo-

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[682] Ibid., p. 171.
[683] *Imperiled Souls*, p. 7.

ment. Comfort shows herself here to be what Phillips would consider a 'reductionist'. She seems to have made up her mind that his troubles fit in with her own 'reduction' of religion, which is rather narrow. Again the priest is explicit, and the sensitive reader can see what he means.[684] For example, when he is told that he has advanced stomach cancer, he forgets God for a moment. This is profoundly troubling for him: 'May God forgive me! I never thought of Him.'[685] What could be worse for the religious believer? How far it all seems from Bergman's tormented pastor and Comfort's picture of a clergyman who doubts whether God exists! At such a terrible time, when he is given the worst news possible, he does not think of his own death, but is concerned with how he *appears* before God. And of course, this has nothing to do with vanity, but has connections to thinking about life. This, we might recall, has *something* of Rush Rhees' vision of what it is to fear death. 'Fear of death in another sense than simply being afraid to die. A horse in an abattoir may fear death. But it does not lead to religious practices.'[686] Rhees is suggesting that there is another way of seeing death, of understanding death or rather fearing death, that has nothing to do with fearing for our lives. 'Fear of death because of *what death* is. That is not the terror of one in mortal danger. The latter is instinctive, the former is not.' So Rhees is saying that there is some reflection, for the religious person, on this.

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[684] Rhees helps us here to understand the differences in understanding, expressed by Bergman, Comfort and Bernanos. 'One thing that distinguishes the believer's worship is the hope which he may have after he has prayed, for instance; or the anxieties which go with his reflexion on the will of God -- which may appear in the conduct of his life. If we wanted to question the genuineness of someone's religion, it is here that we should look: whether he was worried by his sins; whether he was concerned over the fulfilment of religious duties, and so on.' (*Rush Rhees on Religion and Philosophy*, p. 199.) The concerns of the Cure contrast starkly with those of the Pastor. What does he worry about other than the fulfilment of his duties, his own weaknesses, his behaviour before God? The Pastor on the other hand has more 'worldly' concerns. The fact the God doesn't or can't answer his prayers, his feelings for his dead wife, for his mistress. His understanding of his own worship, of the words (and most importantly, the role these words have in his own and his congregation's life) he utters to his parishioners. Comfort understands Bernanos as Bergman appears to have understood him. But following Rhees, we can see that the pastor's understanding of worship is shallow, and his utterance of prayer insincere.

[685] Ibid., p. 273.

[686] *Rush Rhees on Religion and Philosophy*, p. 63.

Come to fear death *because* of its importance in relation to life. Thinking death as something awesome, important, is not the same thing as being afraid for one's life. The horse does not think death is awesome or important. And if death is awesome and important, then so is a way of life.[687]

Enthusiasm for this approach will be tempered by the doubt that this isn't how it *really* is, that this isn't how people *actually* react to the prospect of annihilation. We can see that the initial reaction of the priest to the news is not altogether *Christian*:

> I was alone, utterly alone, facing my death-and that death was a wiping out, and nothing more. With fearful speed the visible world seemed to slip away from me in a maze of pictures; they were not sad, but rather so full of light and dazzling beauty. How is this? Can I have loved it all so much? Mornings, evenings, roads. Mysterious changing roads, full of the steps of men. Have I loved roads so much, our roads, the roads of the world?[688]

But of course, we should pay attention to what Rhees was actually saying. He noted that the 'terror of one in mortal danger' was *instinctive*. It was only natural for the priest to be overcome by this, especially as he thought that his illness was something very different from terminal stomach cancer. But he goes on to deny that the tears he shed were just for himself.

> From what dream had I awakened now? Alas, I had thought I was crossing the world almost without seeing, as one walks with downcast eyes in a glittering crowd, and sometimes I believed I despised it. But that was because I was ashamed of myself-not of life.[...].I know my tears may have been cowardly. But I think, too, they were tears of love...[689]

These last words are significant. The priest is always very aware of his weaknesses, but at the same time displaying deep love for all things, and an awareness of the im-

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[687] Ibid., p. 64.
[688] *The Diary of a Country Priest*, p. 275.
[689] Ibid., p. 279.

portance of life, the fact of life. This was important for Rhees: 'To be concerned about

the importance of life – that is not being concerned at the fact that one is going to

die.[...].It is a concern with life, not with one's lot. (Opposition to 'the world')'[690] We

can see all of this attitude, or way of thinking throughout the novel. The priest's death

does not leave the reader with a gloomy impression, and this is, partly at least, be-

cause of what the priest *is*. I think that Comfort profoundly misunderstands the end of

the novel. She thinks that at last the priest comes to some kind of understanding con-

cerning prayer and God, and that the reader

> comes away with an overwhelmingly positive impression, for the novel offers
> hope to those who are in the throes of despair and reminds us of one of the
> fundamental precepts of Christ, that redemption and salvation is open to all, no
> matter how "lost" one may be.[691]

What she is saying is that the young priest rediscovered his faith and found peace at

last. But if this were so, I think that it would be deeply dissatisfying, for it would con-

form to a 'comforting' picture of Christianity. The priest would have discovered an

easy 'salvation', for he now believes in a loving God. It is the kind of thinking that

Phillips finds unacceptable in the Bergman films.

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[690] *Rush Rhees on Religion and Philosophy*, p. 64.
[691] *Imperiled Souls*, p. 9.

Conclusion

In writing this thesis I had two aims. Firstly, I wanted to address the most controversial areas of D.Z. Phillips' philosophy of religion, clarifying confusion where it exists, and acknowledging that there are aspects of his work that are hard to accept. It is easy to be sympathetic towards critics and the problems they have had with his approach. On the other hand, it is difficult to draw out the strengths of his work when faced with what is, after all, an almost universal opposition to his approach from 'mainstream' philosophers of religion. My second aim in writing the thesis, then, *was* to emphasise the strengths of Phillips' philosophical approach.

I began the thesis by highlighting some controversies that surround Phillips' philosophy of religion. I then went on to examine the problematic aspects of Wittgenstein's thought and Phillips' adoption of some of these aspects. In the first chapter I looked at Wittgenstein's 'descriptive' philosophy and some of the issues that surround this, including the notion that philosophy 'leaves everything as it is' and his understanding of philosophy as 'grammatical investigation'. I then showed how Phillips has applied such terms and expressions to the philosophy of religion. In the second chapter I discussed Wittgenstein's understanding of the term 'language-game', concentrating on the imaginary builders' example. Wittgenstein used this example as an analogy, but commentators such as Rush Rhees have taken it to be more than analogy and because of this have considered it unsuccessful as an example of a language-game. I suggested that reading more into the example than Wittgenstein intended has led to much unnecessary philosophical work. I did, however, *also* suggest that the difficulties that Rhees has with it show us what *is* important here, that to see language as be-

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ing cut off from life is not to see a language at all. In the third chapter I looked at *Phillips'* understanding and employment of language-games and forms of life. I showed that there is widespread misunderstanding of his use of these expressions, but that *his* application of them can be problematic. Understanding what *Wittgenstein* meant by these expressions is not at all easy, so it is understandable that many have found Phillips' application of them within the philosophy of religion deeply troubling. In the fourth chapter I returned to Wittgenstein's descriptive method. While he *claims* that philosophy is descriptive there appear to be many examples of him going 'beyond' description in his philosophical work. Similarly, Phillips appears to have been doing more than describing at times, most notably in his designation of certain religious beliefs and practices as 'superstition'. I suggested that the use of the word 'description' is misleading for it says nothing of the philosophical work that goes into the Wittgensteinian philosophical method. I also suggested that it is these philosophers' understanding of what superstition *is* that is problematic, that of seeing it as a kind of scientific mistake, or pseudo-science. While Phillips dismisses superstition as a mistake, I suggested that not all superstition is the same, that some superstitions *clearly* have a greater force and importance than other kinds, and that it is absurd to class superstition as being in the realm of mistaken science. But this does not mean that superstition is philosophically acceptable, and I suggested that Phillips' thought here is not as easy to dismiss as many might think.

For much of the thesis, then, I have been looking at problematic issues surrounding Phillips' work in philosophy. There is no doubt that Phillips' philosophy of religion is as controversial now as it was forty years ago. The strength of critics' reactions to Phillips is often disarming; as we have seen, his work has been met with confusion, derision and anger. And it is revealing that despite the volume of writing he produced

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during his lifetime, as it stands, I have not found a convincing defence of his approach. What I wanted to do in the *final* chapter *was* to defend Phillips' approach. We might disagree with the details of his application of Wittgenstein's thought to philosophy of religion (and to religion itself), and we might be opposed to how he perceives 'true' religious belief, but *I think* that in his concern for clarity, for *understanding* what is actually said (and for revealing bad philosophy), apparent in his examination of the Bergman films, and in his writings on literature, he offers a stimulating, if troubling, philosophical vision.[692]

To finish I wish to return to something Phillips wrote in *From Fantasy to Faith*:

> As we listen to most contemporary debates about religion, to what passes for a defence of religion and to passes for an attack on it, we may experience a sense of utter hopelessness. We find ourselves saying that nothing can be done. Our surroundings appear more and more absurd to us.[693]

We can appreciate his sense of hopelessness at the narrowness of much contemporary discourse on religion and religious practices. Take the following passage from a recent review in *The Times* by A.C. Grayling of a book on Christianity, by Richard Holloway:

> He says that religion – literally false and the product of human imagination – "helps us cope with life". Let us leave aside the question of achieving solace on the basis of untruths, and say that religion does not invariably help "us" to cope with life; religion as a force in the world is often divisive, a source of conflict, a barrier to progress, and socially oppressive. Little of this enters Holloway's calculation; if it did, and if he attended more closely to what secularists are arguing-namely, that religious belief should be a private matter like

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[692] And yet, even here where *I* think he is at his strongest, one should not assume that his thinking will be welcomed or even *understood*. I presented a much shortened version of the final chapter at a recent film conference, and one delegate assumed Phillips was attacking Bergman because of his *negative* portrayal of religion (rather than simply being concerned with showing religious utterances for what they *are*), and that I was a religious apologist. It is a common assumption that simply because one is not overtly critical of Christianity, one *must* be a Christian.

[693] Phillips, D.Z. *From Fantasy to Faith*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991, p. 115.

one's sex life- would make him appreciate better the ethical outlook that has no truck with myths or religion proper, but addresses human realities in a complicated world without their often obfuscating aid.[694]

The understanding of religion expressed here by Grayling is a common one, reflecting a way of thinking that is unlikely to change. According to Phillips,

> A philosopher, in a survey of recent philosophy, said the brightest and cleverest philosophers have not been concerned, in the main, with issues concerning morality and religion.[...].To be bright and clever is to show that talk of absolute good or evil, and talk of God, does not mean anything.[695]

In conclusion, I think that while Phillips' work is problematic, and will never gain full acceptance within academia, there is much to be learnt from his approach, which at its best, encourages us to think about issues in a way that at least offers the chance of *appreciating* what is being said. As we have seen, what Phillips tried to do was 'to show that a sensibility should be possible...which does justice to both belief and atheism.' These, he thinks, 'should be rescued from what philosophy tries to make of them.'[696] The problem is that there appear to be few philosophers prepared to even accept that his approach is an appropriate way of doing philosophy.

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[694] Grayling, A. C. Review of 'Between the Monster and the saint: Reflections on the Human Condition by Richard Holloway'. *The Times*. Saturday (August 16, 2008), p. 11.
[695] *From Fantasy to Faith*, p. 107
[696] *Philosophy's Cool Place*, p. 168

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