

EVIL, FALSIFICATION AND RELIGIOUS LANGUAGE

I

When the theist claims that the presence of evil in the world does not count against a God who is all-powerful and all-good or that it cannot show that God does or does not exist, he is saying in effect that statements like "God exists", "God is love", "God is good" are not falsifiable. For, on the face of it, we would expect that the occurrence of evil and suffering in the world would be the most obvious state of affairs which would be excluded by such statements, but this is not the case. This brings us face to face with one of the most serious objections brought against theism in recent times; *viz*, that religious or theological statements are cognitively meaningless since they are not falsifiable. For the statement, "God loves us" is presumably compatible with any and every state of affairs.

The religious believer keeps on claiming that God loves mankind no matter what catastrophe or disaster may occur. The occurrence of droughts, earthquakes, hurricanes, floods, wars, murders, diseases, famines, and accidents of various sorts does not make the believer change his mind and say "God does not love us after all", or that "There is no God". What he says is, "God's ways are not our ways", "We cannot fully understand God's love for us", etcetera. In other words, there seem to be no observable facts which can show the assertion "God loves mankind" to be false. It is because of this that the critic claims that religious statements are cognitively and factually meaningless and nonsensical.

In his well-known essay, "Theology and Falsification", Antony Flew points out that "to assert that such and such is the case is necessarily equivalent to denying that such and such is not the case (i.e., that " $p \equiv \sim \sim p$ ", p has the same truth value as not-not- p).¹ What follows from this, Flew claims, is that "if there is nothing which an assertion denies, then there is nothing which it asserts either; and it is not really an assertion."² The religious believer, then, must be prepared to say what would count against his claim that God loves mankind or else accept the fact that his claim is meaningless. But this, alas, he does not and presumably

cannot do as long as he claims that evil and suffering do not count against an all-good omnipotent God.

Flew's challenge to the meaningfulness of religious language is directly connected to the problem of evil and especially when it is claimed that the propositions (1) "God exists and is omnipotent, omniscient and all-good", and (2) "There is evil in the world", are not contradictory or that (2) does not count against (1). For if these two propositions are contradictory then of course this renders religion irrational. And to claim that these propositions are not contradictory is to fall victim to Flew's charge of meaninglessness. And if proposition (2) does not count against proposition (1), then it (proposition (1)) is, according to Flew's challenge, cognitively meaningless, that is nonsensical.

The purpose of this paper is to argue that when the theist offers a solution to the problem of evil (or at least tries to resolve the problem) by claiming that the proposition "There is evil in the world", does not count against the proposition "God exists and is all-powerful and all good", he does not have to sell out as cheaply as Flew's falsification challenge seems to imply.

II

Flew's challenge confronts the theist with the following dilemma: on the one hand he can admit that his assertions and beliefs are unfalsifiable and hence meaningless or he can, on the other hand, claim that his assertions and beliefs are falsifiable, in which case they fit the category of hypotheses and, as such, are not religious. Attempts to meet Flew's challenge range from claiming that religious statements are not really assertions and hence are not falsifiable, but are attitudinal and emotive, to claiming that religious statements are verifiable and falsifiable. For example, I. M. Crombie, commenting on Flew's challenge, says that "suffering which was utterly, eternally and irredeemably pointless" would count decisively against the statement "God is good". But he informs us that we cannot conduct an experiment to decide whether there are evils which are pointless "because we can never see all of the picture". The Christian, however, can see the whole picture by getting into a position "called dying", but although we can do all that, we cannot report what we find.³ What

Crombie's position amounts to is that religious beliefs are hypotheses which can be confirmed or disconfirmed after death. But as A. MacIntyre points out, such a position, if correct, shows that religious beliefs in this present life "could never be anything more than as yet unconfirmed hypotheses, warranting nothing more than a pro-visional and tentative adherence."⁴ What is presumably more appropriate is that religious beliefs (e. g., "God exists," "God loves us") are not hypotheses arrived at by inference from evidence but are held on faith and trust. And to say that a person has faith and trust in God is to say that he has more than a tentative adherence to certain hypotheses.⁵ It is to say, rather, that he is decisively committed to God. The attempt to show that religious beliefs, statements, etc., are falsifiable ends up making them "non-religious". It seems, then, that Flew is, according to R. M. Hare, "completely victorious"⁶ on his own ground. For once Flew's position is accepted, the conclusion to be arrived at is either that religious claims are unfalsifiable and hence meaningless or falsifiable and hence not religious.

The other escape route is to challenge the falsification principle itself. This can be done by showing that the falsification principle is, after all, not really as formidable as Flew makes it out to be. For example, it can be pointed out that there are statements which are obviously meaningful, but which are not falsifiable, e. g., "Every effect has a cause". It can also be pointed out that there are statements which are verifiable and as such have truth value, but which are not falsifiable, e. g., "Someone living today will be alive tomorrow."⁷ But in addition to these criticisms of the falsification principle, I believe that a careful analysis of the concept "meaning" will also reveal the shortcomings of this principle. This I will now attempt to do.

III

Most philosophers (I think) will agree that there is a problem with meanings, but there seems to be a lack of agreement among them as to the cause or causes of the problem. This fact is borne out in the various attempts by philosophers to specify what meanings consist in. As a result, there have been attempts to associate or identify meanings with what expressions refer to, stand for, denote (referential theory), with the ideas that have been aroused

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In order for a person to learn a language, he has to learn to play the various language-games : that is, he has to learn to ask questions, make requests and commands, describe events. Wittgenstein also makes it clear that each language-game presupposes a form of life—a form of life which includes behaviour, attitudes and interests which must be taken into consideration in order to understand the language.

Now, given Wittgenstein's theory of language-games, it is obvious that one theory of meaning cannot be applied to these different language games. For example, the referential theory of meaning applies to certain language-games (e. g., describing, naming), but not to promises, commands and requests. According to the referential theory of meaning, meanings are either associated or identified with what expressions refer to, stand for or denote. Promises, commands and requests are not meaningful *in this* sense at all. It is of very trivial importance that reference is implied in requests, commands, promises. When I say "Do that", of course I am implying that there is a *that* to be done, but the *that* has nothing whatever to do with the meaningfulness of the expression, "Do that". The command, "Come on" might or might not imply any one state of affairs, yet any one hearing it knows what it means. Similarly, I can say, "I promise", or "I beg you", and it might not be clear what is being referred to or if anything is being referred to, yet these expressions are meaningful. Reference may or may not be implied in these, but the point is that the referent(s) is not necessary to the meaningfulness of expression made in commands, etc., in the same sense that it is important in the expression, "This blue coat".

Referring is only one function of linguistic expression; that is, some expressions become meaningful because of some referring relationship (although what is referred to is not their meanings—we shall come back to this) but not all expressions are of this type. The expression "this blue coat" refers to an object and is meaningful because of this referring relationship, but the expression "Look out" does not refer to any particular thing or object and consequently the referential theory does not apply. Wittgenstein also makes it clear that words have a diversity of functions. The functions of words are as varied as the different uses of tools in a tool-box.

“Think of the tools in a tool-box; there is a hammer, pliers, a saw, a screw-driver, a rule, a glue pot, glue, nails, and screws. — The functions of words are diverse as the functions of these objects.”¹⁰

The fact that words have diverse functions and function in different language-games makes it clear that one theory of meaning cannot apply to all these different functions. The context in which a word is used will determine the meaning of the word in that context, and for each different context in which that same word is used, the meaning of the word will change accordingly. Words do not simply picture or describe as was suggested in the *Tractatus*, but are used to express feelings, give commands, to ask questions. In short, the meaningfulness of words varies with the different contexts in which these words are used. And because these contexts are themselves different and varied, no *one* theory of meaning can apply to all of them. The foregoing theories of meaning have failed and must fail because none of them can (by itself) be made to apply to the different language-games. Thus we can no longer look to this theory or that theory, for they are all ruled out by the elastic nature of our language. In order to understand the meaningfulness of linguistic expressions, we have to turn to the “uses” in the different language-games. I will come back to this point later.

IV

We have seen that the elastic nature of our language makes it impossible for any one theory of meaning to apply to it. We shall turn to another problem which revolves around this nature of language. I shall contend that meaning-theories fail (or must fail) because they all seem to presuppose that “meanings” are some sort of *entities* which correspond to meaningful expressions. If this were the case (and given the elastic nature of language), it would not be very difficult to envisage the state of confusion that would result. Not only would there be confusion and complications, but utter chaos; moreover, communication among people would be almost impossible. What I am saying is that if we construe meanings as some sort of entities, changes in the meanings of our linguistic expressions which are so characteristic of our language would not be possible. In other words, the

propositions, properties, and concepts (these being the meanings, or intentions, or logical contents) which correspond to individual linguistic expressions lead not only to confusions but also to absurdities.

Before going on to examine some of the meaning-theories, let us indulge in a bit of semantics to show how these confusions and absurdities come about. The property, *blue* is supposed to be the meaning of the word, "*blue*". The colour of the sky is blue; that is, identical with blue. Here we have an identity statement, but the statements do not have the same meaning. That is to say that whereas the property *blue* is believed to be the meaning of "*blue*", it is not the meaning of, "the colour of the sky"—the meaning of "the colour of the sky" is not the property *blue*. In the same way (i.e., because of the identity statement mentioned above) the property blue is not the meaning of "*blue*". Again, "The author of *Waverley*" and "Walter Scott" refer to the same person, viz., the man Scott, but they do not have the same meaning; that is, although "The Author of *Waverley*" and "Walter Scott" have the same referent, their meanings are distinct from this referent. It would be an absurdity to think that the property *blue* is the meaning of "*blue*" in the same way that it would be an absurdity to think that the man Scott is the meaning of his name.¹¹

We come now to consider the meaning-theories in order to substantiate the claim that meanings are not entities corresponding to linguistic expressions. The referential theory of meaning states that every meaningful expression names something or stands for something or has some naming, designating relationship to something or other. For example, "this red coat" describes, designates a certain particular coat (although the coat is not the meaning) and as such is meaningful. But not all expressions or words refer in such a clear-cut manner. Conjunctions and other connective components of language do not refer to anything but are still meaningful. What, for example, does "but", "and", "therefore" refer to? We can get rid of this problem in the way the Medieval logicians did; that is, by saying that these words do not have meanings in "isolation" but become meaningful in different contexts. But this does not get rid of the problem; it only postpones it. For, there are others which cannot be explained

in the same way as conjunctions. For example, the noun "pencil" and the adjective "courageous" do not refer to any particular pencil or character.¹² When we speak of "pencil" and "courageous", we are led to invoke classes and properties which further complicate the issue.

The ideational and behavioral theories of meaning fare no better. The former identifies meaning with the idea (or ideas) corresponding to expressions and the latter with the stimuli which evoke these expressions and responses to them. The difficulty here is deciding which of the many ideas and stimuli corresponding to expressions we are to identify as the meaning of these expressions.¹³ It is because of this and similar difficulties that we should avoid meanings like the plague. We should avoid meanings not only because of these difficulties but because "...there are, in point of logic, no such things as meanings".¹⁴ It is my contention that it is this failure to recognize this fact which is the disease that has crippled most (if not all) theories of meaning. For they all presuppose (or seem to presuppose) that there are meanings which can be attached to words and linguistic expressions. Let us, then turn our attention to meaning as a function of use.

V

In dealing with meaning and use it should be made clear that we do not mean use as that which an expression has; that is, we do not mean use in the sense of "the use of 'y'", "The use of cars in large cities is dangerous", "The use of child labour is frowned upon by many". Nor do we mean it in the sense of "used for"—the use to which "X" is put; e. g., "Thank you" is used to express appreciation and gratitude. Another point that must be borne in mind when dealing with meaning and use is that use must not be *identified* with meaning. Wittgenstein seems to give the impression that the meaning of a word is to be identified with its use (s) in language when he says : "...the meaning of a word *is* its use in the language."¹⁵ It is clearly misleading to identify meaning with use. For example, the meaning of "authentic" is "genuine", but the use of "authentic" is not "genuine".¹⁶ If someone asked for the use of "authentic", it would be a very poor joke to say "genuine". Moreover, it is possible for a person to come to use a word or

an expression without understanding its meaningfulness and vice versa. A person can learn a particular use of a word by heart without understanding the meaning of the word. Many people know how to use the word "Amen"; they know that it is used to end a prayer, but nonetheless, this word is not meaningful to them. It is also possible for a parrot to utter the words "Hello" or "Goodbye", but he certainly does not know the meanings of these words (not that there are meanings, of course; but the point is meanings are not to be identified with use). I do not mean to imply that meaning and use are not connected in some way or the other. This is clearly false. There are clear-cut connections between the meaning (sense) of a word and its use, "but these admitted connections between meaning and use are not strong enough to warrant identifying them..."¹⁷

When we say that the meaning (the meaningfulness of ...) an expression is a function of its use, we mean that the meaning is manifested in the use or usage, we mean that we are to look to (what Ryle calls) "the utilization" of the expression in question "...in the actual sayings of things..."¹⁸ That is to say that if we want to know how a word or expression becomes meaningful, we must look and see how that word or expression is actually used; we must look to the actual employment of the word or expression which has some sort of equivalence with the first. For example, "procrastinate" means *put things off*. Here we have an equivalence such that we can substitute the one for the other without changing the job (s) which each is used to do.¹⁹ If we know how to use an expression (if we know, that is, when to and when not to use it) and we are told that another expression is used in the same way as this (former) expression, we can easily grasp what this new expression means. Let us take the above example again. If you ask what the word "procrastinate" means and you are told that it is used in the same way as *to put things off*, (assuming of course, that you are familiar with the use of *to put things off*), you will have no difficulty in understanding what "procrastinate" means. It is in this way that meaning is a function of use.

There are some objections to the use-theory which should be considered before going any further. It may be objected that the use of an expression is obscure and consequently is of little help in understanding the meaningfulness of the expression.²⁰ But I

am not sure that I understand what it means to say that the use of an expression is obscure. For, if an expression has a use at all, then it is no longer obscure — it is that use to which we must look and nothing else. Furthermore, to speak of the obscurity of the use of an expression is to assume that there is only one use of the expression; but this is a mistake. Each expression has many uses and surely at least some of these (if only one) would not be obscure.

Another objection to the use-theory runs like this. In many cases we cannot say how an expression is used without saying what sort of things it is intended to refer to, or at least that it purports to refer to them. But this objection stems from the basic misconception that use depends upon reference and hence, for an expression to make sense through its use, it must refer to something. This contention is based on a confusion between "sense" and "reference". In many cases people speak meaningfully without referring to anything. It is the *actual use* of an expression which is important and this does not depend upon what is referred to (as we saw above, this is not always easy to know), but the referring function is part of and included in this use. *Use* is not one activity and referring another (as the objection seems to imply) but the latter is intimately bound up with, and depends upon, the former. For instance, if I say, "It is raining", you do not first check to see if it is really raining (i. e., whether it is true or false) and then conclude that I am conveying some information; but the *actual use* (from the context — use always presupposes contexts) tells you what it is that is being said. If you are going to the store you immediately think about waiting until the rain has ceased, or you put on your coat. I am contending that although our expressions, in many cases, do refer to something or some state of affairs, we do not first try to find out what that something or state of affairs is before deciding how the expression is used. If we did this, there would be no need to find out the use; for use then becomes superfluous. In ordinary usage we look to the way the expression is used in order to find out what is being said, referred to, or conveyed.

VI.

I have contended so far that there are different language-games which must be taken into consideration when speaking of meanings;

for obviously no *one* theory of meaning can adequately apply to all the language-games. I have also contended that there are no such things as meanings, and as a result it is the actual uses of expression in a language-game that constitute their meaningfulness or significance. I shall now attempt to show how all this applies to religious language.

The most severe criticism of religious assertions is, as was pointed out earlier, that they are not verifiable (not even in principle), nor are they falsifiable. The proponent of the falsification principle says that in order for an assertion to be meaningful we must be able to say what circumstances or what state of affairs make it false, what would count against it. The meaning of a statement, according to the falsification principle, is somehow bound up with its falsification. This is precisely where I think the falsification principle has gone astray. For, in attempting to identify meaning with falsification, the proponents of this theory are presupposing that meanings are some sort of entities, hence the need for empirical verification and falsification. This is so because the falsification principle makes it quite clear that meaning is directly connected with the particular state of affairs which falsifies a particular statement. A statement which cannot be falsified by any particular state of affairs is in fact compatible with all or any state of affairs and hence meaningless. In other words, every statement has a particular state of affairs which falsifies it and hence renders it meaningful. It is for this reason that I say that the falsification principle as a criterion of meaning presupposes that meanings are some sort of entities. (Verification in principle fares no better because it also depends on those circumstances which would, in principle, verify or falsify a statement).

It is interesting to note that the problem of the factual status or cognitivity of religious language and any language for that matter, the criterion of which is either verification or falsification, is also questionable, once we point out that the falsification and verification principles treat meanings as entities. But once this version of meaning is ruled out, it becomes quite clear that religious assertions and all assertions mean in the same way-and this includes the factual status and cognitivity of language. For it is clear that to say that a statement is factually meaningful is just another way of saying that it is meaningful, The practice of limiting cong-

nitivity to verifiable and falsifiable statements is, it seems to me, not only too restrictive, but on the whole lacks justification.

What I am saying, then, is that if my contention that there are no such things as meanings is correct, then the falsification principle as a *criterion of meaning* (and presumably cognitivity) fails. Incidentally, following the falsification and verification criteria of meaning, we should have to say not that religious assertions are "meaningless", but that they are "without meanings." For, "without meaning" is more appropriate as the opposite of "x is the meaning of...". But as was pointed out above, there is no such "x". Meanings therefore are myths, and since they are myths, it is misleading and confusing to ask for "the meaning of expressions". Thus, instead of speaking of "the meaning of...", I shall speak of the "meaningfulness", "significance", "sense" of religious assertions. It is in this context that the use-theory comes in.

Use presupposes users and users presuppose a using community of some kind and it is to this community that we must turn our attention when we seek to understand the meaningfulness of a language. We must first of all realize that one language community is different from another. Consequently, we have a "scientific language", "religious language", "aesthetic language".²² There might be one over-all conceptual structure of which these "languages" are different uses, but within this structure we do, as a matter of fact, use language differently.

The scientist and the theologian operate from certain beliefs which may be called premises, presuppositions or paradigms and which are ultimate in the sense that they are not deductively demonstrable, nor are they falsifiable or verifiable by sense-experience. By "presuppositions", I mean those principles (Hume called them natural beliefs) which are basic to our way of life—without which life as we know it would not be possible. My claim is that the scientist no less than the religious person presupposes these principles, but each also has other principles which are important and basic to his whole discipline. It is obvious that the scientist cannot continue his investigations if he does not hold belief in the reality of the physical world, but I know of no "proof", *qua* proof (there are many attempts, but these are far from satisfactory, e. g. G. E. Moore's proof of the external

world) for the reality of the physical world. In addition to this the scientist presupposes the law of causal connection and other laws of nature, the uniformity of nature, the principle of induction etc. Without these and other principles, scientific investigations come to a halt. But the important point to bear in mind is that none of the principles which are so basic to the scientific method is provable or verifiable in sense experience. The scientist holds these on "faith". Now, in much the same way, it is my contention that the theologian presupposes certain principles which are ultimate to his whole discipline. (It is interesting to point out that the theologian presupposes a lot of what the scientist presupposes, but not vice-versa, but this need not bother us — the important point is that each has presuppositions which are necessary in order for any sort of investigation to be possible.) For the theologian, the existence of God, the belief that God created the world, the belief that God loves mankind, the belief that evil and suffering are not final, but that in the end good will triumph, the belief that God revealed himself in the Christ etc. are such presuppositions. He accepts these as given and goes on to elucidate and explicate the whole complex of his religion.

In the case of religion, these presuppositions are *articles of faith* which the believer accepts as his basic point of departure. For example, the religious person accepts as basic presuppositions "God loves mankind", "God created the world and all that is in it", and "God exists". It should be pointed out that these religious beliefs (and particularly belief in God's existence) are not the sort of things which are provable or disprovable in the way scientific theories are provable. If it were the case that these proofs were essential to these beliefs, then of course people should and ought to be affected by them one way or the other. But the very fact that they are not affected one way or the other is enough to cause us to take a second look—so to say—at the purpose of proofs and demonstrations for God's existence. In the case of flat earth devotees, it is quite evident that they are being unreasonable about the whole matter—it is evident because there are ways of deciding the issue quite accurately, and this has been done in many different ways. That the world is round is no longer a matter of guess work—there is a great deal of evidence to substantiate the claim that the earth is round (or at least elliptical)

and *not flat*. Those who ignore this evidence and continue to say the world is flat are simply flying in the face of facts—they are utterly unreasonable. But notice that this is not the same as belief in God and other religious beliefs. “Evidence” is not appropriate to religious beliefs in the way it is appropriate to scientific theories and to the shape of the earth. This does not mean of course, that evidence has no place in religion, for clearly it does have. But whatever place it has in religion and theological matters, it must always be borne in mind that evidence is not essential to the forming of religious beliefs, claims, etc. in the way it is in science, history, etc.²³ And it is because of this that those who are unaffected by the amassing of evidence for and against religious beliefs are not being unreasonable. For them, such “evidence” simply does not apply. It is in this sense that I believe they ought to remain unaffected by attempts to prove or disprove God’s existence. It is not that they are ignoring important evidence or facts, but that they are pointing out that such evidence or facts do not apply—do not fit the case. Of course I am not saying that proofs and demonstrations for God’s existence are useless. Philosophical proofs for God’s existence and philosophical discussions about the attributes of God are useful and necessary if they are meant to clarify important philosophical issues such as determining the limit of human knowledge. But if they are used as arguments for and against religion, it is in this sense that I believe they are irrelevant. A remark by Kierkegaard is very pertinent here. He once pointed out that any attempt to prove or demonstrate the existence of God is “an excellent subject for a comedy of the higher lunacy”.²⁴ This is so because if “...God does not exist, it would of course be impossible to prove it; and if he does exist it would be folly to attempt it”.²⁵

Philosophical proofs for God’s existence do not seem to make a difference one way or the other to religious believers. Proofs for God’s existence are defended and refuted all the time, but the non-Christian or non-religious person, and the Christian or religious person are virtually unaffected; they go on as if nothing has happened. When a proof is well defended, unbelievers do not become believers because of it, and when a proof is refuted, believers fail to become unbelievers because of it. In other words, proofs for God’s existence seem to make *no difference* to anyone one way or the other. And what fails to make a difference, it seems

to me, is of little or no value to anyone. The point behind all this is that the Christian religion rests on faith and revelation and philosophical proofs and natural theology as a whole must presuppose this. I think Rush Rhees is right when he says that the difficulty in trying to understand theology has to do with talk about "first causes". "The fault," he says, "*is in thinking of natural theology as the FOUNDATION of the rest of religion, in some sense*"²⁶.

I have said that religious language functions in a special way and those who understand this function are those who are aware of the basic presuppositions of this language. This does not mean that this language is "closed" to all but those who use it (i. e. the religious believers); there is no "stop sign" to prevent outside investigation. But it does mean that in order for someone outside this language community to understand it, he has to come to terms with the presuppositions and subsequently its function. It is usually the practice of those who discuss religious language to neglect the way in which religious or theological concepts arise and become meaningful in the religious experience in the religious community. But it is precisely these experiences in the religious community that are necessary for the understanding of the language. This is not characteristic only of the Christian religion alone, but of all religions; that is to say that every religion prescribes a pattern of practices (sometimes varying in great detail) which, following a particular set of presuppositions, brings one to a realization of what is meant by the statements or propositions which express the truths of that particular religion.

In the same way, if one is to understand science, one has to understand it only in the light of scientific presupposition. For example, in trying to understand what scientists are doing, one has to take into consideration the rules of induction, the uniformity of nature, the universal application of the principle of explanation, which the scientists presuppose. In other words, a language becomes meaningful only when we are aware of the way or ways in which that particular language functions, and how it is used by its participants. In the case of religious language, "...it is a question of the role which our statements about God play in our worship or in our lives. Or if we are outside religion and discussing it, the reference is still to the use the language has among those who practice it."²⁷

One point of clarification. In speaking of religious language and the religious community as being some what special, I do not mean to imply that the language is not problematic to the users. The Christian religion is not only problematic, but its language is sometimes vague and the users are often perplexed and frustrated as they struggle to understand their religious beliefs. And in struggling to learn and understand the truth and significance of the religious "form of life", a person may even come to reject it and opt for another. The history of religion (and human history in general) is replete with examples of conversion from one world-view, one form of life, to another. It is this possibility of being able to question one's form of life and if necessary to reject it which makes religious belief "responsible" and consequently distinct from empty fideism. One cannot, however, reject all forms of life or world-views without lapsing into insignificance and vague generality. Thus when a religious person rejects his religion or doubts its basic presuppositions, he is *ipso facto* admitting that he is no longer a member of that religious community, but from this it does not follow that this religious form of life is incoherent or that its basic tenets are inconsistent. All that has happened is that this person has rejected one form of life and has embraced another.²⁸

Although there are difficulties with religious language, religious people communicate successfully among themselves—they obviously understand their language because it makes a difference to them. And if it makes a difference to them, then it must be performing its function; if not, they would obviously try to change it. A person who stands outside the religious community may not understand at first what is going on in the religious community, but he can see that these people understand their language and communicate successfully with each other. And if he familiarizes himself with their practices, he too may understand their language.

Religious beliefs and religious language make a difference to religious people in much the same way that belief in the existence of the external world makes a difference to people. Although we cannot prove that the external world exists, we still believe that it does, for without such a belief, life, as we know it, would not be possible. Thus, believing in the existence of the external world makes a difference to the way we live. And what makes a difference

is understandable and intelligible at least to those to whom it makes this difference. A language is meaningful because it makes a difference one way or the other. Meaningless expressions do not make a difference to anyone because no one understands them. "Irlig blog klok" does not make a difference to anyone one way or the other, but "God loves us" does. John Hick says "...the significance of a given object or situation for a given individual consists in the practical difference which the existence of that object makes to the individual."²⁹

Religious utterances, e.g. "God is love", "God is just", "God is merciful", "God loves us as a father loves his children" *make a difference* to the religious believer. When the believer says "God loves us as a father loves his children", he is saying that it makes a difference to him—a difference in that his life differs from what it might be if there were no God to love him. He does not allow the occurrence of evil and suffering to change his belief in God because his belief in a God of love is not formed in the absence of evil and suffering, but in the midst of them and in spite of them. The believer (when he utters the above statement), in spelling out the difference that the existence of a loving God is alleged to make or have made in the past within human experience, is at the same time indicating the meaningfulness of the statements.³⁰ Similarly, belief in the Resurrection of Christ makes a difference to Christian believers. Whether the Resurrection of Christ was physical or not is not really important. What is important is that something happened that day which made a significant difference in the lives of many people. It called the church into existence and, through it, continues to make a difference to people morally, socially, politically and otherwise.

VII.

I have contended that there are no such things as meanings. I have also contended that is only through the use of language that the religious community operates from presuppositions and its experiences are interpreted on the basis of these presuppositions. To interpret something should not give the impression that the resulting experiences are merely subjective or "private" lacking objective correlations because interpretation is not limited to some forms of experiencing (e.g. in religion or aesthetics) but is involved in all forms of epistemological enquiries. Every act of experience,

every epistemological act involves interpretation of some form or another. Religious language, then, is intrinsically bound up with the religious experiences of the religious community and it is extremely difficult (if not impossible) to attempt to understand the former without the latter.

The fact, then, that the religious believer maintains his belief in a God of love even though there are myriads of instances of evil and suffering does not mean that such a belief is unreasonable, empty or meaningless. To be sure, the believer is appalled at the amount of suffering and evil in the world, but he does not conclude from this that God does not exist or that God is not a God of love after all. But instead, his faith in God is strengthened. As A. MacIntyre points out, "To the believing mind the facts of evil apparently constitute not evidence against, but a motive for belief".³¹ Thus although statements like "God exists" and "God loves us as a father loves his children" are held to be true by the believer in spite of the world's evils, they are none-the-less meaningful because they are uttered on the basis of faith and trust—the faith and trust which are central to the believer's way of life.

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NOTES

1. A. Flew, "Theology and Falsification", *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, eds. A. Flew and A. MacIntyre, (London: SCM Press, 1970), p. 98.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 98.
3. I. M. Crombie, "Theology and Falsification", *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, eds. A. Flew and A. MacIntyre, p. 124-126.
4. A. MacIntyre, ed. *Metaphysical Beliefs*, (London: SCM Press, 1970) p. 171
5. It is interesting to note Wittgenstein's remarks on the view that religious beliefs are hypotheses. Wittgenstein did not think that religious beliefs, e. g., in the last judgement are unreasonable, but he called those who held religious beliefs as hypotheses unreasonable. D. W. Hudson points out that those whom Wittgenstein considered unreasonable "in a sense implying rebuke" were apologists for, or against, religion who made the "ludicrous" assumption that religious beliefs can be corroborated or refuted by treating them as though they were scientific hypotheses. Wittgenstein referred to an attempt by Father O'Hara "to show that religious beliefs can be scientifically proved" and said: "I would say,

- if this is religious belief, then it's all superstition." (Cited by D. Hudson, *Ludwig Wittgenstein : The Bearing of His Philosophy upon Religious Belief*, (London : Lutterworth Press, 1968), p. 50.
6. R. M. Hare, "Theology and Falsification", in A. McIntyre and A. Flew, eds., *Op. Cit.*, p. 99.
 7. This example was given by K. Yandell, (*Basic Issues in Philosophy of Religion*, Boston : Allyn and Bacon Inc., 1971), p. 10. Yandell points out that " 'Someone living today will be alive tomorrow' cannot be falsified, for it is not or will not be true then that no human being will be around to record this fact and so falsify it."
 8. See W. P. Alston, "The Quest for Meanings", *Mind*, 72, 1963, p. 79.
 9. L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 19 (Oxford : Blackwell Ltd., 1963.)
 10. L. Wittgenstein, *Op. Cit.*, Section 11. See also Section 23.
 11. These examples are borrowed from Professor N. L. Wilson. See "Property Designation and Description", *Philosophical Review*, Vol. 64, 1955, and "The Trouble with Meanings", *Dialogue*, Vol. 4, 1964.
 12. W. P. Alston, *Philosophy of Language*, (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey : Prentice-Hall Inc., 1964), pp. 14-15.
 13. J. L. Austin puts this rather succinctly when he says that "... there is no simple and handy appendage to a word called 'the meaning of (the word) "X" ' ". (J. L. Austin, *Philosophical Papers*, 2nd Ed London : Oxford University Press, 1970, p. 62.)
 14. W. P. Alston, "The Quest of Meanings", *Mind*, Vol. LXXII, No. 285, 1963, p. 84.
 15. L. Wittgenstein, *Op. Cit.*, Section 43. See also G. Pitcher, *The Philosophy of Wittgenstein*, (N. J. : Prentice-Hall Inc., 1964), p. 251f.
 16. These examples are borrowed from W. P. Alston. See his "Meaning and Use", in G. Parkinson, ed. *The Theory of Meaning*, (London : Oxford Univ. Press, 1968), P. 158.
 17. G. Pitcher, *The Philosophy of Wittgenstein*, p. 251.
 18. G. Ryle, "Use, Usage and Meaning", in G. Parkinson, ed., *Op. Cit.*, p. 114.
 19. W.P. Alston, "Meaning and Use", in G. Parkinson, ed., *Op. Cit.*, p. 150.
 20. See, for example, J. N. Findlay, "Use, Usage and Meaning" in G. Parkinson, ed., *Op. Cit.*, pp. 117-118.
 21. In some cases some verificationists go so far as to identify meaning with verification. M. Schlick says, "The meaning of a proposition is its method of verification" in "The Future of Philosophy", in *Gesammelte Aufsätze* (Vienna, 1938). Cited by W. T. Blackstone, *The Problems of Religious Knowledge*, (N. J. : Prentice-Hall Inc., 1963, p. 6.)
 22. When we speak of forms of life, and language-games, we are at the same time saying that insofar as these forms of life are social, some sort of medium of communication is needed. The medium of communication is referred to as "Language" and so we have "religious language",

"Scientific language". But it is very important to note that "language" here is being used in a metaphoric sense. Religious language and scientific language are not on *par* with English, Sanskrit, German and French. The latter are languages in the primary sense, but the former are not; they are somehow derivative. The scientist and the religious person do not understand each other not because they are speaking "different languages"—they both speak one natural language (e. g., English, French, German) or another—but because of what we might call their "technical vocabularies". The scientist and the religious person use the same words, generally speaking, but they use them differently in each discipline. But the one natural language (e. g., English) is the basis, the substratum of religious and scientific languages. If not, it is not at all an easy matter to explain how communication could take place. In this sense, then, "religious language" is not a language like English, French or Spanish, but is a derivative of any one of them—it is, if you like, a religious use of language in the primary sense. It is clear that a person using religious language does not need a translator, at least not in the sense that a person who speaks French might need one in order to understand what the other who speaks German is saying.

23. For example, when a person says, "God loves me", he is not drawing a conclusion on the basis of a number of instances of God's love; he is not saying "Because of these instances of God's dealings with me, I conclude that he loves me." Believing that God loves him is part of his understanding of God and of his religion. Belief in God's love is part of this person's religious commitment. And evidence (in the above sense) is irrelevant to this commitment and belief, but is useful for purposes of the elucidation of such a belief and commitment. Evidence (empirical evidence) is useful then, in that it provides actual instances of religious beliefs which count for reassurance and elucidation on the part of the believer. But it is not relevant in the formulating of these beliefs in the way it is in the formulating and establishing of scientific hypotheses.
24. S. Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, ed., D. F. Swenson, (New Jersey : Princeton University Press, 1962), p. 54, note 3.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 49.
26. Rush Rhees, *Without Answers*, (London : Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969) p. 111.
27. Rush Rhees, *Op. Cit.*, p. 130.
28. It is the possibility of such conversion, it seems to me, which rules out the charge of complete relativism brought against the notion of forms of life. For it shows that forms of life not only bear "family resemblances" to each other but that they share common backgrounds (e. g. the uniformity of nature).
29. John Hick, *Faith and Knowledge*, (N. Y. : Cornell Univ. Press, 1966), p. 100.
30. John Hick, *Philosophy of Religion*, (N. J. : Prentice-Hall Inc., 1963) p. 106.
31. A. McIntyre, ed., *Metaphysical Beliefs, Op Cit.*, p. 174.