God, Wittgenstein and John Cook

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Abstract
This essay is a meditation on Wittgenstein's injunction to 'look and see', especially when it is applied to the debate over theological realism. John Cook thinks that the injunction should be followed in metaphysics and epistemology, something he believes that Wittgenstein himself did not do. I am inclined to think that Cook is right about this, even though I am not persuaded by him that Wittgenstein goes wrong because he was committed to Neutral Monism. Interestingly, Cook thinks that there is no need to adopt the look-and-see approach when it comes to the philosophy of religion, and this paper tries to show why he is wrong to think so.

Theological Realism makes the questionable presumption that God is a unique sort of being (that created the world and intervenes in it). Reductionism takes Realism seriously enough to want to restate or alter what believers say to or about God in order to avoid a commitment to the existence of such a being. Rather than choose between these two theories, I want to argue that the presumption that there is an ontology implicit in religious discourse should be rejected because it fails what I call the 'look-and-see' test.

I associate Wittgenstein with my questioning of this presumption because the instruction to look and see goes back to him. Some philosophers think that he did not question it, and, in fact, was a reductionist in his philosophical theology. (John Cook even thinks that Wittgenstein was a reductionist about material objects or other minds.) However, I believe that my rejection of both Realism and Reductionism is in the spirit of Wittgenstein's philosophy, especially because of my emphasis on looking-and-seeing.

My focus is on what Cook has to say about (belief in) God in *The Undiscovered Wittgenstein*.[1] I consider him to be an invaluable Wittgenstein guide. His earlier essays compare favorably with the best attempts at presenting the later Wittgenstein's thinking, especially on the problem of other minds.[2] Cook still has reason to

[1] J. Cook, *The Undiscovered Wittgenstein* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2005). All page references in the body of this text are to this book.

[2] See, for example, 'Human Beings', in P. Winch (ed.) *Studies in the Philosophy of Wittgenstein* (London: Rutledge & Kegan Paul, 1969, and

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think that he went about dissolving that problem in the right way in his earlier work; he just thinks that he was wrong to attribute what he did to Wittgenstein. Cook changed his mind after realizing that he no longer could make Wittgenstein come out right, and this transformation in someone who is so knowledgeable about Wittgenstein's writings should make us wonder what could be problematic about Wittgenstein's philosophizing. This is what I try to do in the first section, where I am concerned with whether Wittgenstein practiced what he seemed to preach.[3]

Although my focus is not on Wittgenstein, I do want to say something about how Cook reads Wittgenstein because the underlying issue his reading raises is how to understand references to the 'uses' of words. According to Cook, Wittgenstein employed a 'Master Argument' which claims that certain key terms in ordinary language mislead us because they seem to refer to such ontologically challenged things as material objects, (other) minds, and God. The solution is not to revise ordinary language, but to remind ourselves how the words for these things are actually used. As applied to God, the Master Argument concedes that Christians or Jews seem to believe that a unique sort of being exists when they talk to or about God. However, such talk is reducible to what they are using 'God' to do (pp. 305-8), such as, to express awe or reverence for the natural world, or unconditional love for everyone.

What are we looking at when we look at the uses of words? This issue is raised by the attribution of this Master Argument to Wittgenstein. Rather than concern myself with the question of whether he actually relied on the argument, I prefer to ask what really is involved in looking and seeing (how words are used), especially when it comes to God.

My concern is with what Cook has to say, in his own right, namely, that Judaism or Christianity should be understood as having a theoretical or metaphysical position when it comes to God. We can challenge realism when it comes to material objects or other minds by questioning whether they are what we seem to be referring to in our everyday talk. But, Cook thinks, that option is not available to

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'Solipsism and Language', in A. Ambrose and M. Lazerowitz (eds.) London: George Allen & Unwin), 37-72.

[3] See J. Cook, 'Did Wittgenstein practise what he preached?' *Philosophy* **81** (2006), pp. 445-62. Cook thinks Wittgenstein's practice reflected his commitment to Neutral Monism, whereas I think that he did not systematically apply the look-and-see approach.

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us when it comes to God because in Judaism and Christianity God is to be conceived in ontological terms: to reject that ontology means ceasing to be a believer, whereas rejecting the ontology of material objects or minds does not really mean that we have to give up or change anything.

Whereas the look-and-see approach should be used when it comes to thinking critically about how philosophers conceive of material objects and other minds, according to Cook that approach is of little value when it comes to thinking about how philosophers think about God. I disagree, and my real object in writing this paper is to demonstrate the value of the approach when it comes to critically examining theological realism.

1. Cook as Job

Cook's critics, who defend Wittgenstein against him, remind me of Job's 'comforters', who turn on Job because they take God's side. I sympathize with Cook because I, too, have problems in reading Wittgenstein. Like Cook I am struck by the bizarreness of many of Wittgenstein's examples, and by how unclear it is what is supposed to be going on in them. I also struggle to think through many, if not most, of the things he says. So, I have to wonder why Cook's critics have neglected to consider the possibility that it may not be possible to make Wittgenstein come out right.

Even so, I am so much in awe of Wittgenstein that I, too, take his side against Cook. Like his critics, I think that Cook ignores the context of many of the passages he cites, or forces a reading on them that is based on what he already knows Wittgenstein must be saying. Cook can only refer to contemporaries of Wittgenstein who were neutral monists, even though Wittgenstein never mentions them, let alone says that he subscribes to their position, as Cook thinks he does.[4] And Cook defends claiming that Wittgenstein advocated Phenomenalism, a theory if there ever was one, by claiming that Wittgenstein, who often warned us about the perils of theorizing, did not think of it as a theory at all because it does not purport to refer to 'nonphenomenal, unobservable entities' (p. 310). All of these negative reactions to Cook's work I also have.

[4] According to Neutral Monism, reality consists exclusively of atoms of experience, which may be characterized, indifferently, as mental or physical. Cook's argument for Wittgenstein being a neutral monist is, *Wittgenstein's Metaphysics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

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However, Cook's attribution to Wittgenstein of Neutral Monism (Phenomenalism and Behaviorism) is part of a diagnosis of how he went wrong. He assumes that Wittgenstein is too good a philosopher to be careless, superficial or undisciplined. And so, Cook, after trying out other explanations, argues that that there is a systematic basis for what Wittgenstein says and does, namely, a conception of reality as consisting of atoms of experience.[5] And, if we assume that the passages Cook cites do have a systematic basis then his readings do seem more plausible.

Unlike the critics, I think that Cook is right about Wittgenstein not approaching skepticism, essentialism, meaning, etc. in the right way. If we now know better ways of dealing with them, that is not surprising. After all, we have learned much in the interim by following what we thought were Wittgenstein's leads. So, although I do not believe that Wittgenstein's failures in this regard can be explained as due to his adoption of Neutral Monism, I do believe that it is hard to make Wittgenstein come out right.

To see the problem, consider *Philosophical Investigations* I #66, where Wittgenstein asks us to consider all the 'proceedings that we call "games".' He adds, 'I mean board-games, ball-games, Olympic games, and so on.' Wittgenstein tells us to '*look and see* whether they have something in common,' rather than assume that that must be so.

If we try to follow his instructions, we get confusing results. Sometimes when there is talk of 'calling' something a 'game', the speaker means to be denying that it still is one, as when a sportswriter complains, 'We call them games, but professional competitions at the highest level really are businesses.' However, when we look at cases where certain human interactions are called 'games (people play)' we are making a contrast with what these interactions are supposed to be, namely, not games, but something less childish or destructive. Moreover, no one would say that the children's game hide-and-seek is 'called a game' when there is no comparable distinction possible between what it is called and what it really is. And the same is true of, board games, such as *Monopoly*: it would not be said to be 'called' a 'game', unless, perhaps, we wanted to draw attention to the cheating or arguing going on during the play by referring to it as a 'game within the game'. So, looking and seeing yields confusing

[5] Cook uses a similar approach to argue that a metaphysics not unlike Neutral Monism is behind Hume's epistemology in his excellent paper, 'Hume's Scepticism with Regard to the Senses', *American Philosophical Quarterly* **5** (1968), 1-17.

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results, and we can only conclude that when Wittgenstein explains what he means by proceedings that we call 'games', he does not mean what would be said to be 'called' a 'game'.

Moreover, although the Olympics are referred to as 'Games', Wittgenstein does not seem to have realized that an individual competition in the Olympics, such as a heat or final, is not referred to, for example, as a 'game of high hurdles', unless some confused theory is dictating what is to be counted as a game.

And without the reference to any Games of which a race is a part, would it be considered a game? Let us look and see. Imagine that after Ali asks that they play a game, Leila responds, 'Let's play a game of racing to the other end of the field.' Here, she seems to be suggesting that they *pretend* to race, which is not what we want. So suppose she says, 'Let's have a race.' And suppose that they do; is it a game? The answer seems to depend on whether or not Ali (or the others) would accept her suggestion, and without knowing that we cannot know whether we are supposed to look at the race to see what it has in common with all the other things called 'games'.

Others find nothing confusing in what Wittgenstein says. As they see it, he is directing attention to the games themselves to see what they have in common (as a basis for applying the same word to them all). This suggests that we consider references to the 'game of x', such as, 'The game of baseball is distinctive in not involving a clock.' But, it is unclear what we are supposed to be looking at when we look at the game of baseball, since it is not an (individual) 'proceeding' but a kind of abstraction. (The same is true of the 'games' in a *Book of Games*). Moreover, a sandlot or practice game may have arbitrary time limits for how long one team is at bat or in the field; the game itself may have a curfew. However, by understanding the author's point, which may be about clock-watching as a kind of cultural attention-deficit disorder, we can understand what he is talking about or whether what he says is right. Otherwise, we may deceive ourselves, by ignoring what we bring to the understanding of what the author says, into thinking that 'the game of baseball' is something we can look at.

Whatever Wittgenstein may have been anticipating, the fact is that he is unclear and even confusing about what is involved in looking-and-seeing. That is the conclusion I want to draw from the problems we have had trying to understand what he says.

When it comes to the philosophy of religion, it may have seemed obvious to Wittgenstein, or Wittgensteinians like Phillips, Rhees and Winch, that to look-and-see means attending to the differences in belief (existence, evidence, hypothesis) in religion as opposed to

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other areas. When it comes to games, the strategy of looking at games, rather than our talk of them, is questionable, as I have just been suggesting. But, this has not deterred Wittgensteinians from acting as though there are things to say about the distinctiveness of the concept of the 'logic' or 'grammar' of 'belief (in)' in the language game of religion or in the form of life that is religion. And they obviously think that they can do so by looking at religious belief itself. I do not want to make too much of this, at least as far as Wittgenstein is concerned. He wrote little about religion, and his remarks about it seem more like suggestions or ideas for further exploration than they do a fully developed position or theory. Even so, I think that he is presuming that all he needs to do is look at the thing-itself, religious belief, and not talk of that belief.

Consider, for example, Wittgenstein's idea that belief in God is absolute and so logically distinct from an opinion or hypothesis, as is shown by its 'regulating for all in his (the believer's) life.'[6] The idea is that no matter how much evidence I have for an opinion or hypothesis, that evidence would not be sufficient to dictate everything I do. This explains why a believer would not say that he is of the opinion that there is a God, or that it is likely that there is one, or that there is overwhelming support for there being one.

What did Wittgenstein look at to make this determination? If he considered the case of an actual believer would he find that she was as completely devoted to doing God's will as Wittgenstein's observation seems to suggest? Or, is he saying that she must be if she is to truly believe in God? And is he arbitrarily selecting certain believers and their beliefs? These questions are rhetorical; there is no answer because there is no evidence that Wittgenstein has thought about how to answer them.

Mind you, I can understand how a Kierkegaard (or Rhees or Phillips), acting as a spiritual advisor or preacher can urge believers to make belief absolute, in Wittgenstein's sense, however difficult it may be to do so. However, Wittgenstein (or Rhees or Phillips), when he is functioning as a philosopher, because he is making a claim about the 'logic' or 'grammar' of religious belief, needs to 'look-and-see'.

The fact is that it is difficult to practice what Wittgenstein seemed to preach. Cook makes a helpful distinction between *Investigative Ordinary Language Philosophy* (IOLP), which Cook thinks Wittgenstein did not practice, and *Metaphysical Ordinary Language*

[6] L. Wittgenstein, *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978), 54.

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Philosophy (MOLP), which he thinks that he did practice.[7] IOLP works with 'detailed examples . . . in which it is clear who is speaking to whom, to what purposes, and with what awareness and knowledge, and with what awareness or knowledge.' The details 'determine what it comes to to say this in this situation' (p. 153). By contrast, MOLP explains away the apparent conflict between a certain theory that is being held and a speaker's actual words by saying there is no conflict with the person's '*actual* meaning, which is determined by the practical application of those words' (p. 141). I think that there is a much more simple and generous explanation for Wittgenstein's practice: Although he wanted to practice IOLP, he found it difficult to do, because he may not have fully comprehended what practicing it involves.

2. The look-and-see approach; Cook and his critics

So difficult is it to apply IOLP that Cook's critics, and the early Cook, also do not practice it when they need to do so, even though they are not applying anything like the Master Argument. Consider, for example, Deborah Orr's claim that what a child does by reaching for the milk (or a cat does in chasing a mouse) shows that

> there is a very common sense of the verb 'believe' by which we say that pre-linguistic children and even animals believe things without attributing a grasp of, or the use of, propositions to them. For instance, we say that a dog is barking because it believes its master has arrived or that a child is smiling because it believes it is about to be fed or crying because its mother is going to leave it.[8]

She concludes that Wittgenstein is not committed in *On Certainty* to the position that Cook criticizes, namely, that there are *hinge* propositions, which are free of doubt, but upon which the very possibility of doubt depends.

Although she claims to be relying on what 'we say' to establish that there is a pre-linguistic, non-cognitive sense of belief, she does not

[7] J. Cook, *Wittgenstein, Empiricism and Language* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 140-158.

[8] D. Orr, 'Did Wittgenstein Have a Theory of Hinge Propositions?' *Philosophical Investigations* **12**, 1989, 140. Orr is criticizing J. Cook, 'Notes on Wittgenstein's On Certainty', *Philosophical Investigations* **4** 1980, 15-37, and 'Metaphysics of Wittgenstein's *On Certainty*', *Philosophical Investigations* **2** (1985), 81-119.

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think about what could be established by examining an actual case, i.e., she fails to 'see'. I can imagine saying of the dog, 'She is barking because her master has arrived.' But, why say that she *believes* that he has arrived, unless he hasn't and she doesn't usually bark when someone has come to the house? Orr is arguing for the existence of a non-cognitive belief in the existence, for example, of the milk or cat. 'The child thinks milk exists.' The fact is that she has not asked herself when we would actually say this – she does not look, and so does not consider what we could mean in saying it, let alone whether it is true that such non-cognitive beliefs actually exist – she does not see.

I submit that when she fails to do so it is because it is difficult to appreciate the fact that to consider a statement or assert it when philosophizing is not the same thing as actually saying it or imagining it to actually be said. This point also applies, at times, to Cook's earlier papers.

Wittgensteinians who admired Cook's earlier work wonder how he could have been so right then and so wrong now. However, he was not all that right in his early papers.

For example, he claims that there is a crucial difference between the perceptual and affective senses of 'to feel'. As support, he claims that I can have a stone in my shoe that I do not feel, but that, 'I feel a slight pain in my knee' comes to the same as 'There is a slight pain in my knee.''[9] However, as Frank Ebersole has pointed out, we talk of feeling something in a certain part of our bodies to indicate that sensation or feeling has returned after numbness or paralysis.[10] By contrast, when we stub our toe, we would not say, 'I feel a lot of pain in my toe.' We would not say it because it would be the wrong thing to say, as can be determined by trying to imagine it actually being said. It would be wrong, too, to suppose that even though we can't imagine it actually being said, nevertheless it is true. Presumably, what is true is something we, as philosophers, want to say, and that is exactly what is being called into question, namely, that there is something we can say as philosophers even though it is not something that would actually be said.

Why did Cook go wrong? As it happens, in this (early) essay, he did talk in terms of 'language games' or 'grammar' or 'logic' or of what 'makes (no) sense', on the dubious assumption that this concept could help make the point that looking-and-seeing cannot make.

[9] J. Cook, 'Wittgenstein on Privacy', *Philosophical Review* **74** (1965), 289.

[10] F. Ebersole, 'Feeling Eggs and Pains', in *Things We Know* (Xlibris 2001), 127. Ebersole does not indicate that it is Cook whom he is criticizing.

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However, a more generous diagnosis is that he went wrong because he did not do something that is so difficult to do that almost no philosopher does it, namely, ask himself when he or anyone else would actually say that he felt a pain (somewhere).

Rather than consider other examples where Cook's earlier work is problematic, I prefer to consider his thinking about religion. Whereas Cook does think that we should use the IOLP (look-and-see) approach when it comes to the external world or other minds, he does not think that it is of much value to do so when it comes to God.

3. How things are in religion

How do philosophers of religion, who do not know God, like Cook (or myself), know enough about who or what God is to even understand the thesis of theological realism? Cook has a very persuasive answer to this question, namely, that 'until recently' philosophers have supposed it to be 'obvious' that,

> the term 'God' in Judaism and Christianity is the name of a unique sort of being, a being that created the universe, communicated with many of His human creatures, answered their prayers, and so on (p. 329).

Cook calls this the 'Traditional View', and the philosophers whom he has in mind as not accepting it ('recently') are Wittgenstein and certain Wittgensteinians like D.Z. Phillips. Note that as Cook states the view, it is not just how *philosophers* think of God, but what really is the case in Judaism and Christianity. And so, we, who do not know God, can know (something about) Him by knowing what the Traditional View says about Him.

Cook uses the truth of the Traditional View to argue that the only alternative to theological Realism is Reductionism. To dispute Realism, our only option is to reduce the talk of God in terms of the Traditional View to something that does not commit us to the existence of something so intellectually suspect; otherwise, we would be committed to the need to change or even reject what Christians or Jews (say they) believe.

How does Cook know that the Traditional View has it right? His answer is that we have only to ask believers or 'listen to them praying, reciting their creeds, and so on'. What we find when we do so is overwhelming support for the Traditional View.

However, this support is problematic. For their answers to be of any value, those surveyed have to understand what they are being

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asked (and why they are being asked it). Many interviewees would be put off by the asking of a question that seems to presuppose a certain closeness or intimacy. And if the questioner is forthright and explains the philosophical point that the interviewee is being asked to help make, she may refuse to answer because, she says, philosophy confuses her. And even if some believers are cooperative, their answers don't seem to be of much value when it comes to revealing what they believe. This is because to answer properly they must think hard about the answers to questions, for example, about what their actions reveal about what they really believe, and the survey situation is not conducive to such thought.

Despite what Brian Davies says, such a survey of believers is not an example of an 'objective' 'Wittgensteinian 'look and see account'.'[11] Wittgenstein is not interested in how people respond in the artificial context of a survey and when they are trying to be agreeable, but in what they say in actual situations.

You would think that what Christians say to or of God, unlike the replies to the survey, are what we should to look at when we follow the instruction to look and see. Interestingly, Cook would disagree because he thinks that,

> It would be a great mistake to think that we can solve philosophical problems about religion by paying close attention to the ordinary use of words such as *God*, *miracle*, *sin*, *evil*, *salvation*, *resurrection*, *heaven*, *hell* and other terms that figure prominently in what religious believers say.

It would be a mistake because thinking it protects Christianity (Judaism or Islam) from any claims that it is 'intellectually suspect' by placing it in a person's 'conceptual world where it cannot come into contact with reality'.[12]

Despite appearances to the contrary, Cook is being consistent about not relying on the look-and-see approach to solve problems about religion when he refers to what believers say in prayers. Instead of citing particular prayers, he is thinking of what those praying must believe, namely, that there is a being or entity, God, who is listening to their prayers. Cook approvingly quotes Searle as saying that,

[11] B. Davies, 'D. Z. Phillips on Belief in God', *Philosophical Investigations* **30** (2007), 221.

[12] J. Cook, *Wittgenstein, Empiricism, and Language*, op. cit. 157.

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> When ordinary people pray it is because they think there is a God up there listening.

And he agrees with Searle about the fact that it is the existence of God that gives praying (or any other religious 'language game') its 'point'.[13]

What Cook approves of is the idea that prayers presume that there is someone or something listening to them (even though he thinks Searle is wrong to talk in terms of 'language games') (p. 362). Otherwise, believers would not pray to God, for example, to look after soldiers in battle or heal the sick or bless the newly married. So, instead of looking and seeing, Cook relies on it-stands-to-reason thinking to argue that by praying a believer is showing what she believes about what the term 'God' refers to in her religion.

From the perspective of a spiritual advisor, what is significant is that Searle and Cook are thinking of a possible pay-off when they refer to praying having a point. It is noteworthy that the believer who thinks this way has the wrong kind of relationship with God because she thinks of Him in terms of what she can get from Him.

When he describes how to tell what Christians believe, Cook includes a reference to Credos because he is especially interested in belief in the Last Judgement or in life after death. Even so, he does not actually quote from the Creeds, many of which are devoted to the Trinity or the 'substance' of Jesus. And even if a Creed did explicitly involve an affirmation of the Traditional View, I am not sure how that fact would tell us much more than that some Council decided how certain theological controversies should be resolved. Cook is wrong to assume that the believer really believes the Creed she is reciting, and wrong to assume that those who promulgated it thereby determine what Christianity is.

Although he does not explicitly include it when he refers to different kinds of evidence for the Traditional View, he does cite passages from Scripture, most of which have to do with the Apocalypse or Last Judgement. And even if he did cite passages in support of the Traditional View, he would have to assume not only that Christians believe whatever these passages say, but that each passage somehow stands on its own and can be interpreted and understood without knowing much about the religious or rhetorical context, which he ignores.

[13] B. Magee, 'Wittgenstein: Dialogue with John Searle,' in B. Magee, *The Great Philosophers* (London: BBC Books, 1997), 345. Searle is criticized in D.Z. Phillips, *Wittgenstein and Religion* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 22-32, and it is Phillips' criticism that Cook is attacking.

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Cook has other reasons for supporting the 'realist interpretation of religious beliefs' (p. 328), i.e. the Traditional View, as we will see. Significantly, he does not rely on the very approach, looking-and-seeing, that might have discouraged him from using it-stands-to-reason thinking about what religious belief involves.

4. Belief in God as belief that God exists plus an attitude

Since believers believe in God, does it follow that they believe that (the unique sort of being that is) God exists? Cook thinks it does follow, and his reasoning is based on how he thinks of belief and the difference it makes in the life of the believer. Although belief is a 'momentous matter', its momentousness is reflected in the believer's attitudes, not in the belief itself: the belief is the reason why the believer has the attitudes that she does; the belief explains why she has these attitudes.

Cook illustrates his argument by referring to the belief in life after death, which he treats as accompanying belief in God. He imagines two men about to be executed on 'trumped-up' charges. One is angry and vengeful; the other accepts his fate with 'calm resignation and good cheer', and explains why he does so by referring to his belief in the existence of God and everlasting life. This example illustrates how the belief is one thing, the attitudes of resignation or good cheer another (pp. 328-9).

Cook's use of 'belief in the existence of God' as a synonym for 'belief in God' is confusing. Surely, we are not to think of the being that is God as possibly extinct, and the believer as having faith that that is not the case, as an ornithologist might have faith in the existence of a supposedly extinct species. But, it is unclear how to understand it otherwise, except as a statement that somehow assumes that belief in God incorporates the belief that God exists.

Even so, Cook seems right to mark a distinction between belief in God and everlasting life, and the calm resignation or good cheer that may accompany the belief. Not all believers who are facing execution have such an attitude, and people who are not believers may have the attitude (in similar circumstances) – that is why the distinction has a point. I am unclear what someone who believes in life after death believes – that she is not going to be dead? – and so I am not sure that the belief by itself explains the attitudes. Even so, I think I understand the distinction Cook is drawing between belief in God and life-after-death, and the attitudes that come with it.

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However, the distinction is problematic as far as belief in God is concerned. The problem is that calm resignation and good cheer (in the face of death) need not be religious attitudes, and may exist independently of any relationship with God. By contrast, calm resignation to God's will, or joy in loving God, *is* a religious attitude, but it is hard to distinguish between the belief and the attitude. In fact, the love of God or the full engagement in religious practice seems to be an embodiment of the belief rather than something explained by it; such an 'attitude' is directed towards God or informs the relationship with Him, and does not exist independently of that relationship.

Cook's choice of attitudes that accompany belief is significant because he ignores others, such as sanctimoniousness or intolerance, which are problematic from a religious or spiritual point of view. I am uncomfortable saying that belief in God explains (or is the reason for such attitudes). However what interests me more is how such questionable attitudes could be considered embodiments of the belief in God, which is what Cook needs them to be in order for his argument to work. The fact is that having these attitudes is evidence that there is something wrong with believer's relationship with God.

Cook would object to my argument on the grounds that it reveals an arbitrary preference for some believers over others. In this connection, Cook cites the claim that Muslim suicide bombers are 'moved by superstition, not religion, when they believe that their heroics will be lavishly rewarded in paradise' (p. 363). That suicide bombers have this (sole) motivation is simplistic, and ignores many other factors, such as a promised financial reward for their families or pressure from handlers. More significantly, the real objection on the part of a religious teacher to the thinking of suicide bombers is not that they are moved by superstition but by self-interest. And the claim that self-interest is not a religious motivation hardly seems arbitrary, any more than does a comparable claim about intolerance or self-righteousness.

Any impression of arbitrariness is due to the assumption that what is and what is not religious (or a manifestation of a relationship with God) is a philosophical, rather than a religious matter. As a non-believer (with no pastoral concerns), Cook wants to be able to talk about what belief is without presuming to be acting in a religious capacity. And, of course, I am doing the same thing when I criticize how Cook uses the example of the suicide bomber. However, I am only saying what I think a religious teacher would want to say, for example, about how the love of God should be selfless (and not based on what God will do to reward the believer). If Cook disagrees, he would also be doing so in the capacity of a religious counselor,

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something he has no interest in being. So, the real question raised by Cook's arbitrariness-argument is what Cook himself is doing in saying what he does about belief in God.

Cook makes clear that he objects to what he thinks of as the Wittgensteinian idea of a believer's 'conceptual world' that cannot be challenged by asking whether it accords with reality. I can see no reason why the look-and-see approach presumes to disclose the existence of such a world; or that believers even have a concept of God, let alone a 'conceptual world'. Even so, Cook objects to reliance on the approach because it seems designed to undermine attempts at showing that the Traditional View is 'intellectually suspect'. I know that there is a theological or philosophical tradition, with which I am in sympathy, of questioning why Christianity is an intellectual matter at all. However, what I have tried to show is why Cook's attempt at keeping alive the possibility of showing that it is intellectually suspect is itself intellectually suspect.

Presumably, what Cook thinks is suspect is the idea of God as a unique sort of being for which there can be no empirical evidence. That is why it is important for him that God be a being, which is how the Traditional View describes him. And in the next section I critically examine that description, where I hope to make clear why, Cook to the contrary, the idea that God is a being is a test case for the look-and-see approach.

5. God as a being

If we use look-and-seeing to avoid letting a metaphysical theory tell us that God is a (unique sort of), then the idea that God is a being seems problematic. We make references to human *beings* when there is a complaint about mistreatment or neglect ('no human being should be treated that way'); we also do so to talk about us as a species ('human beings are not that different from other primates'). Significantly, we don't refer, for example, to dogs or fishes as animal or fish *beings* (even when they have been neglected), unless, perhaps, we are referring to mythological creatures or divinities, such as the fish-being, Dagon, of the ancient Philistines. That we are referred to as (human) beings may have something to do with the Biblical comparison of human beings with the angels, or to our being created in the image of God. Whatever the explanation, the idea that God is a being, a divine being, seems wrong. God is God; saying that He is a divine being seems to be a way for a non-believer to deny His uniqueness.

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Moreover, when it comes to our own ontology, the talk of us as being a certain kind of being is not explained by saying that we are *human* beings. This is because the sorting (of people or anything else) is into ontological categories – material; material-and-immaterial; immaterial; or the like. What seems to be of especial concern to Cook is God's ontological status as an immaterial being (whether or not God is unique in the sense of being the only such thing), for which there can be no empirical evidence. This ontological use of 'being', in connection with God, is just what I want to question.

Ironically, in 'Human Beings' Cook uses the look-and-see approach to remind us that, for example, our body would be said to be found in a ditch to refer to where our corpse was discovered; or that our body would be said to be covered with bites to indicate how extensive the biting was. With neither example is it possible to understand Descartes' attempt at driving a wedge between our bodies and us. Cook uses these and other examples to show how 'extraordinary' (and problematic) Descartes' use of 'body' is. The irony is that he does not use the approach when it comes to his own classification of God, as a unique (immaterial) being. If he had done so he would have seen how questionable certain key assumptions are in his philosophical theology: that God is a (certain unique sort of) being; that we can classify beings; and that the terms in classifying beings really can be applied – all these are questionable assumptions.

Why say what God is? I have only considered the possibility that He is a being, and have said nothing about whether he is an 'entity', 'reality', 'thing', or the like. I have not done so not only because I do not think any of these other alternatives are more promising, but also because I am unclear about what I would be doing in trying to say what God is. Since I do not know God, how can I know what the right thing to say about Him is? The fact is that I would have no religious purpose in doing so, and I am confused about what other purpose there could be.

The way to know God, as many preachers will remind us, is by becoming members of a religious community; we can know God by becoming able to pray or worship Him. However, we are considering the idea that we can know enough about what we are asking about, namely, God, without participating in any religious activity. I am so much of an outsider that I have to confess that I have no idea who or what God is. I might experience this alienation from God as an emptiness in my life, in which case I might respond to suggestions about how He might become part of it. However, we are considering a different and problematic suggestion, namely, that we can have a question about (what) God (is) without having any interest in having any kind of relationship with Him.

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In this section we have been critically examining the idea that God is a (unique sort of) being. The idea is important to Cook because he compares belief in God to a superstitious belief in demons, angels, ghosts, extraterrestrials, and the like, where the presumption is that there should be perceptual evidence or experience for their existence. This presumption seems to extend to the belief in God when He is also referred to as a being. Believers speak of their 'experience' of God, perhaps when participating in a religious observance, but such experience is very different from the kind of perceptual experience that Cook must think is needed when it comes to superstitious beliefs. And in the next section I want to look more closely at how he uses the comparison of religious belief with superstition to argue against a non-realist position like mine.

6. That God exists

Cook satirizes nonrealist thinking about God by trying to apply that thinking where he knows a nonrealist like myself would not want it to be applied. He imagines that children hear or see eerie sounds and lights in an abandoned house and give the name 'Glimpy' to the creature (ghost) they think is haunting it (pp. 331-7). Since we do not know Glimpy, we should say little or nothing about Him as an object of fear or even awe; therefore, by my argument, it would seem to follow that we, who do not participate in the observances of the children at the haunted house, do not even know what we are asserting or denying when we say that the children are victims of superstition.

However, the idea that belief in God is comparable to a belief that the house is haunted or that the strange sights in the sky are UFO's (p. 362) is hard to understand. For the comparison to work we must think that the believer is confused by what she experiences or perceives, and so draws the wrong conclusion about what is happening. Ironically, the thinking behind this idea is reductionist (and problematic): to liken belief in God to a superstition we have to reduce that belief to mistaking something – (eerie) lights – for something else.

And the same point applies to the idea that God is an invented or imaginary being. A murderer may try to avoid arrest or conviction by trying to divert suspicion to a very large and hairy intruder whom he claimed to see at the scene of the crime. A deluded person may imagine that she sees and carries on conversations with a person no one else can see or hear. However, it would be wrong,

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if not just silly, to suggest that God was invented by someone (for self serving reasons), or that people who pray to Him are no different from people who talk to imaginary friends or hallucinated enemies.

An obvious rejoinder is to compare belief in God with belief in the gods of the many religions of the peoples of the world.[14] The realist makes the comparison because he thinks that the believer in God is going to say that these other gods do not exist (because the worship of them is idolatry), and by doing so the believer seems to leave herself open to the question of how or why God is different; if (you say that) these other gods do not exist, then why isn't it also true that God does not exist?

The strength of this objection also is its weakness. Its strength is that it relies on the believer to introduce the idea of God as existing by insisting that other gods do not exist; its weakness is that without the cooperation of the believer any impetus for introducing that idea is lost. Perhaps, a realist like Cook is misled, by the attacks by some believers on the 'false' gods of other religions, into thinking that it is that easy to introduce the idea that God does or does not exist.

Does God exist? The theological realist, and almost any philosopher of religion seems to be one, wants to be able to ask this question. What or whom does she think the God is whose existence is in question? The dubious assumption behind the denial that the god of another religion exists, is that we know just what that god is or supposed to be, even though we are outsiders when it comes to that religion. And even if the assumption is overlooked, we have the same problem when it comes to God: how can those of us who do not know God, presume to know enough about what or who He is to even understand the idea that He exists or does not exist?

Philosophy may be confusingly influenced by talk of the existence of God when it comes to the Ontological, Cosmological and Teleological Arguments. Significantly, it is possible to be persuaded by a proof that the Unmoved Mover (Original Designer; Greatest being Conceivable) must exist, without believing in it, i.e. without the acceptance of the proof making any difference in our life. However, the real issue raised by the proof is whether, when we are persuaded by the proof to say that what it calls 'God' exists, we are really asserting that God exists. The rationale behind the look-and-see approach in philosophy is that it should be used to

[14] For a critical examination of Wittgenstein and Winch's ideas about the beliefs of 'primitive' peoples, see Cook's 'Wittgenstein on Primitive Practices,' in *The Undiscovered Wittgenstein*, op. cit. 273-301.

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test whether what we say when we philosophize is something we can imagine actually being said. And so, to use that approach we need to try to imagine someone to actually say that God exists and not just when asserting it as the conclusion of a proof.

We can imagine situations where 'God exists' or 'There is a God' (or its denial) would actually be said. People say something like, 'There is a God' (or 'There is no God') when something unexpected and wonderful (or something very unlucky and even tragic) has happened. As I imagine it, they need not believe in God to say it, and if they don't they are not saying that they now do believe in Him. I think of them as expressing wonder and even awe (or disappointment and even despair) about what happened. Otherwise, I would have to suppose that they are thinking in magical terms of good (bad) luck, i.e. as having a superstitious belief not unlike the belief in ghosts. I am not being reductionistic about their claim that there is a God because I can see no reason for saying that they are making such a claim. The test of whether they are is to see whether that is how what they are saying would be characterized – 'are you claiming that God exists?' – and I can't imagine any other reaction than astonishment at the suggestion that they are making any claim at all.

We can also imagine someone to say, 'God exists. He must exist. Things are so hopeless otherwise.' As I imagine it, the speaker who has suffered personal losses, or is depressed about social-political developments, is expressing a desperate hope for things to get better. However, she is not saying that she believes in God. It may seem paradoxical, but when you think about it you realize that by saying that He must exist, she is not saying that she believes. Here, too, she does not seem to be claiming anything at all. Otherwise, what she says raises the question of the difference God's existence would make to her. Some believers find hope just in having a relationship with God; is she saying that just by existing God would make her hopeful, even if she does not really believe in Him? Or, does she think that God will stop people from killing one another or bring her loved ones back? I ask these questions to underscore how this reading of what she says seems to make her guilty of a kind of magical thinking, which, of course, Cook would want to criticize. However, I also want to emphasize how the reading is a mistake: she should not be understood as making a claim at all; rather than understand her that way, I submit that it is better to read her as not saying anything about God that could be the basis for a theological ontology.

The same point applies to the case of someone who used to believe and now says, because of certain terrible things that she has experienced, 'There is no God. God does not exist.' As I imagine it, she

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is talking about the effects her tragic experiences have had on her relationship to God; what she says us about her loss of belief should not be understood independently of that relationship. Is she saying that God, as she conceives of Him, is in charge of managing events so that these tragic things do not happen? If we understand her that way then what she is saying does seem to embody an ontological theory. The problem is that such a reading is unfair. She is saying that her faith did not survive what happened; she is not really implying anything about what God should have done if He really existed.

That 'God is dead' (i.e. does not exist?) is an observation about our culture or stage of historical development. And, as such, there is a lot of truth in it, no matter how alive a religious revival may be in the United States or elsewhere. The truth is that the (western) world has become secular, and people no longer can speak to or of God as confidently as they once did. However, there is nothing in this observation to support an ontological or theoretical thesis about what or that God is.

I conclude that the look-and-see approach does not support the Traditional View, but that metaphysical, it-stands-to-reason thinking, is needed to do so. The Traditional View not only is a statement of realism, but is the basis for the very possibility of realism because it provides an account of what God is that overcomes the problem of how someone who does not know God can nevertheless say things about what or who he is. However, as we have seen, there is no real argument for the Traditional View.

7. Conclusion

Let me conclude with some reflections on the attribution of a metaphysics or metaphysical system. Cook uses it to explain how a philosopher has gone wrong. He also uses it to criticize the idea that there is a metaphysics embodied in our everyday talk and thought. In this paper I have been concentrating on still another use of it, namely, to characterize what God is (in Judaism and Christianity).

There is a problem with all of these uses. The problem is not with any inconsistency in Cook's approach: he is consistent in using the attribution of a metaphysics or ontology in a critical way. The problem is that a metaphysical view is so difficult to understand. To attribute it to a philosopher requires that the view itself be clear. And this Cook will have difficulty trying to show. The only things that really exist are atoms of experience – this is the basic

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assumption of Neutral Monism. But Cook does not explain what such atoms could be, or what it could mean for them to be the only things that exist, because he believes that it is not possible to make it clear.

I have been suggesting that the same thing is true of the Traditional View. He wants to attribute it to believers, even though he thinks it is 'intellectually suspect'. However, he does not explain how the things the view says about God can be understood, something I have tried to show is a problem. That is to say, he wants the view to be metaphysical or theoretical and he thinks that such a view is suspect. But there has to be a view in order for there to be a problem, and that is what I think should be questioned.

We differ, too, on how we react to problems that arise when we try to understand Wittgenstein's later writings. Contrary to Cook's critics, I have been concerned not to defend Wittgenstein against what the critics take to be Cook's assault on him, but to understand the problems Cook has with him. And contrary to Cook, and despite any impression to the contrary that I may have given, I am inclined to think that anyone who gets things right is doing so in the spirit of Wittgenstein. As I have indicated, there are reasons to question whether Wittgenstein practiced what he preached. However, rather than diagnose Wittgenstein as failing to do so because of a commitment to a metaphysical system, I prefer to think of his failure as being due to the fact that what Cook and I require of him is very difficult to do, even for someone as gifted as Wittgenstein. So, the difference between Cook and myself really is a difference in our philosophical attachments: I see the influence of Wittgenstein in what I think is my best work, whereas Cook now thinks that when he gets something right it is in spite of Wittgenstein and not because of him.

And although we are both on the outside of religion, we differ too in what we think about this fact. He thinks that believers have made a serious mistake, one that a philosopher is well equipped to point out, because the mistake is of a metaphysical nature. I disagree. Unlike him, I want to take the approach that he says we should use on other problems in philosophy and use it on attempts like his to show that believers have a suspect metaphysical position. Like him I am an unbeliever; unlike him I do not think I am any more (or less) enlightened because of it.

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