Renewed, Dissolved, Remembered: MacKinnon and Metaphysics

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An Unread Review

'I have some longstanding debts: to Donald MacKinnon, who introduced me to philosophy at Aberdeen between 1950 and 1952; to Cornelius Ernst, who got me to read Wittgenstein, together with Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, at Hawkesyard in 1957–60; and to Adolf Darlap, who helped me to understand Heidegger (much easier than understanding Wittgenstein), in Munich between 1964 and 1965'.[1]

Serendipitously, a few days before being invited to contribute to these celebrations some remarks on that 'longstanding debt' to Donald MacKinnon, while sorting out some papers I came across three yellowing pages of typescript. On the top of the final page was written, in that inimitably energetic and near-illegible hand: 'Done for *Theology* in July 1977, but rejected by the editors as unsuitable on the inflexible recommendation of Dr James Mark (reviews editor). DMM'. (This was by by no means the only occasion on which Donald had noted the inflexibility of one to whom he usually referred as 'the brother of the Commissioner of Metropolitan Police'.) The spurned offering was a review of Christopher Stead's *Divine Substance*, which had been published earlier that year.[2]

'Divine substance': it would be difficult to imagine a topic more fundamental to that 'controversy between idealism and realism' which 'lies at the heart of the *Investigations*'; a controversy Fergus' treatment of which, in the fifth and sixth chapters of *Theology after Wittgenstein*, and in his contribution to a conference held in Cambridge, in 1986, in MacKinnon's honour, displays his indebtedness, not only to Wittgenstein and Heidegger, but also to MacKinnon.[3]

As my small contribution to these celebrations, therefore, I propose, first, briefly to summarise Fergus' treatment of the controversy in those two texts; secondly, to bring to daylight and to comment on, MacKinnon's review and, in the third place, to note a somewhat puzzling disparity in their respective estimations of metaphysical enquiry.

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Kerr on the Controversy

The fifth chapter of *Theology after Wittgenstein*, 'Suspicions of Idealism', sets out from the 'disconcerting' frequency with which philosophers interpret Wittgenstein's later work as 'an ingenious revival of metaphysical idealism' (Bernard Williams is exhibited as guilty) or, at the very least, as displaying 'idealist inclinations' (the translators of the second volume of Wittgenstein's *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology* are in the dock).[4]

In fact, Wittgenstein repudiated 'the realist/idealist dilemma'. His position was that: 'Things do not reveal their properties to us as if we were wholly passive recipients, with no contribution of our own to make. Nor are we absolutely free to impose whatever grid we like upon the raw data of sensation. The colour and number systems belong in the realm of that interplay of nature and culture which is "the natural history of human beings" (*Philosophical Investigations* 415). There is no getting hold of anything in the world except by a move in the network of practices which is the community to which we belong' .[5]

A brief discussion of 'alternative conceptual frameworks' contrasts Wittgenstein's position with Donald Davidson's: 'For Davidson, to think of a conceptual framework is to think of a language; but for Wittgenstein, to think of a language is to think of some activity, such as warning, pleading, reporting and innumerable others ... For Wittgenstein, it is our bodiliness that founds our being able, in principle, to learn any natural language on earth ... Paradoxically, it is not our bodies but our minds that get in the way of our understanding each other'.[6]

Wittgenstein sought to trap his reader 'into realizing just how seductive and compelling the idea is that language rests on rationality, and human action upon self-consciousness'. The fact of the matter is, however, that 'Language neither grew on human beings like hair nor did they sit down and invent it'. Whereas 'the metaphysical tradition entrenches the myth that there has to be an element of reflection or deliberation in every respectable human action ... Wittgenstein, with his radical anti-idealism, keeps reminding us that our action, on the whole, is an unreflective and instinctive reaction to the manifold pressures and appeals of the common order to which one belongs. And the point of reminding us of this really rather obvious fact, is to persuade us not to be ashamed of it'.[7]

If idealism, 'in the philosophical sense, means that ideas are more fundamental than action, or that meanings are all in the head, then it is hard to imagine a more radically non-idealist way of thinking than Wittgenstein's... . With his emphasis on action and life, practice and primitive reactions, Wittgenstein's way of thinking is as non-idealist as any philosophical reflection could be. His metaphysics-free vision of human life

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is radically non-idealist'. Nevertheless, the following chapter, 'Assurances of Realism', seeks to show that he is 'not an ordinary realist either'.[8]

'The controversy between idealism and realism lies at the heart of the *Investigations*', not because Wittgenstein thought it important to insist upon his realism, but because 'It is no great exaggeration to say that [his] later work centres upon dissolving this dilemma', for both the idealist and the realist are in thrall to 'the myth that speaking, and *a fortiori* thinking and meaning, are, fundamentally, ostensive definition of physical objects'.[9]

Donald MacKinnon's 1976 presidential address to the Aristotelean Society, entitled 'Idealism and Realism: an Old Controversy Renewed', attributed this renewal to Michael Dummett: 'In his recent writings on the philosophy of logic, Michael Dummett has insisted that the dispute between idealism and realism is the central issue of metaphysics'.[10] Fergus Kerr, noting that 'Under Dummett's tutelage, philosophers now regard the controversy as bearing upon certain classes of statements', would, I think, agree, but this agreement carries the sting that the central issues of metaphysics require, in his judgement, not renewal, but dissolution. 'Our *life* has traditionally been regarded as accidental and marginal to the great metaphysical debates about words and things, thought and reality, self and world, and so on', and, 'even in its most modern form', 'the ancient controversy between realists and idealists ... remains entirely within the boundaries of the metaphysical tradition'.[11]

It comes as no great surprise that the concluding section of this chapter is entitled: 'The End of Metaphysics'. Here, Kerr goes so far as to say that 'The metaphysical tradition might even be defined as the age-long refusal to acknowledge the bodiliness of meaning and mind' and, with the last shreds of cautionary qualification discarded: 'The metaphysical tradition just *is* the disavowal of the mundane world of conversation and collaboration in which human life consists'.[12]

The title of Fergus Kerr's paper at the Cambridge conference of 1986, glossing that of MacKinnon's presidential address, succinctly restated his conviction that the ancient controversy required, not 'renewal', but 'dissolution'.

'For years ... sometimes with a certain ferocity, MacKinnon has sought to expose an idealist bias in much modern theology'. That the sense in which this placed him in the 'realist' camp might require somewhat cautious characterisation is suggested by the considerable respect which he showed for Michael Dummett's 'interrogation of realism'.[13] It would seem that, in the 'old controversy', as in its 'renewed' version, something fundamental was at issue which was in danger of being obscured from view by the terms of the debate. Kerr cites Renford Bambrough's version of 'Ramsey's maxim: when a dispute between two parties is chronic there must be some false assumption that is common to the two parties, the

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denial of which will lead to the resolution of the dispute'.[14]

In the present instance, where might that 'false assumption' be sought? 'It was on a Sunday in November 1935, after I had finished Greats at Oxford and was spending a fourth year reading the Honour School of Theology, that one of my former tutors in philosophy, (Mr, now Sir Isaiah Berlin) took me to the Philosophical Society to hear John Wisdom give a paper on Moore and Wittgenstein'. That Sunday evening MacKinnon began to learn a lesson the fruits of which were to remain quite central to his thought, namely: 'the crucial importance of Wittgenstein' s contention that we are obsessed by the habit of supposing the meaning of a word to be an object, and in consequence are impatient of the sheer hard work involved in understanding a word or expression, by mastering its role or use'.[15]

No-one who has been present as often as I have at one of MacKinnon' s relentless demolitions of the folly of supposing that 'for every substantive there is a corresponding substance'[16] could be in any doubt as to either the importance or the difficulty of struggling against a philosophical *climate* in which the paradigm of human utterance was 'the cat sat on the mat'; a climate in which no-one ever asked whose cat it was or where the mat was placed, let alone whether or not 'Fire!' might have been an utterance of equal interest and importance, but only whether we were dealing with what was, in fact, the case, or merely with our impression of it.

Fergus Kerr follows Wittgenstein in characterizing a philosophical climate in which it is assumed that, because 'we can think what is not the case', therefore there must be some kind of 'gap between us and the world', as 'metaphysical': 'From the very outset, "Realism", "Idealism", etc., are names which belong to metaphysics. That is, they indicate that their adherents believe they can say something specific about the essence of the world'.[17]

'For Wittgenstein, we might say, it was not a matter of reviving the realist *versus* idealist controversy in the hope of resolving it but rather of recovering a sense of the place of the subject in the world which would render the controversy superfluous'.[18] At which point, Kerr broadens the discussion to notice similarities with Heidegger' s attempt 'to put a stop to the whole project of looking for ways to reconcile the subject with the world, mind with reality', and with Charles Taylor's efforts, 'deliberately combining Wittgenstein and Heidegger', to furnish an account of the *self* which is not in thrall to the illusion that human beings are 'detached, observer[s] of the passing scene'.[19]

Perhaps because this essay was a contribution to a Festschrift, delivered in the presence of the one being honoured, Fergus Kerr's essay does not contain any very direct or epigrammatic evaluation of

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MacKinnon's contribution. But his warm endorsement, in conclusion, of MacKinnon's description of Kant's 'subtle and strenuous effort to have the best of both worlds, to hold together a view which treated learning about the world as a finding, with one that regarded such learning as a constructive act',[20] suggests that, while regretting MacKinnon's continued use of the *terminology* of 'realism' and 'idealism', he does not see this as having fatally undermined the power and importance of his lifelong exploration of the limits of experience.

Divine Substance

After an introductory paragraph expressing his gratitude for 'a work of first-class importance', MacKinnon's review of *Divine Substance* heads straight for the heart of the matter:

> 'The notion of substance is one which has played so central a part in traditional Christian theology, and has long been the target of such ill informed criticism that any serious attempt to assess its significance and the validity of its employment must initially take the shape of the sort of meticulous historical inquiry that Professor Stead has undertaken, and only on that basis proceed to constructive evaluation. Inevitably, therefore, [if] the weight of the first part of his enquiry falls on Aristotle this is because he is fully aware both of the extent to which both in *Metaphysics Z* and *H*, and in the Categories, Aristotle is building on and rigorously criticizing his Platonic inheritance, and of the extent to which later exploration of the notion, e.g. by the Stoics and Plotinus, proceeded by way of critical engagement with Aristotle's table of categories. There are issues in which he fails completely to carry conviction [I imagine that an edited version would have read: 'fails to carry complete conviction'], e.g. in respect of the vexed question of the relation between Aristotle's theory of substance, and his understanding of individuality. But no one reading what he has written on this topic will fail to realise, not only the intricacy, but the great importance of the points at issue.'

It is not, I think, an exaggeration to say that lifelong wrestling with that 'vexed question' was at the heart of MacKinnon's philosophical theology, which always found its focus in consideration of the 'ομουσιον. In a paper read to a seminar at Cambridge some ten years before the Stead review was written, MacKinnon, considering the criticism that theologians 'lay upon successive generations [of Christians] the burden of mastering a particular metaphysical tradition or a crucial part of it', went on: 'I say metaphysical *tradition*: for it is important to see the doctrine of substance less as a precisely formulable dogma than as the name of a series of explorations whose very nature oscillates as they develop'.[21] According to MacKinnon, 'the central crux of Aristotle's

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treatment of substance' is to be found in 'the extent to which he wavers between identifying substance with the individual thing in its concreteness ... and with the form that makes it what it is ... It is as if he cannot make up his mind which of the two best merits being regarded as the nuclear or pivotal realisation of being'.[22] As an 'Appendix on God and Substance in Aristotle' makes clear, similar uncertainty attends attempts to speak of God.

In the very next sentence of that essay on '"Substance" in Christology', we find a version of his favourite description of metaphysical enquiry; a description which, as we shall see, recurs in the review: 'What certainly emerged from a study of the *Metaphysics* is that [Aristotle] believes that "first philosophy", a very important part of philosophical enquiry, is concerned to give as comprehensive account as possible of such notions as thing, quality, existence, causality, truth, which enter into discourse concerning any subject-matter whatsoever, which indeed seem uniquely pervasive in their exemplification'.[23]

> 'On page 129 Professor Stead refers to the question whether the categories are concerned with things or with words as "the one clearly formulated question which we can trace in antiquity". Here I am sure that his judgement, resting as it does upon extraordinarily impressive scholarship, is unquestionably correct. But I find it impossible not to wish that he had at this point been able to go further, and to explore (with reference to the doctrine of the categories) the relations between the logician, the grammarian, and the metaphysician. He numbers the late Professor G. E. Moore among his philosophical masters, and it is worth noticing that in the very important contribution recently made to the philosophy of logic by [Moore's] literary executor, Dr Casimir Lewy, in his *Meaning and Modality* (CUP 1976), the issues of the relations between words and concepts, sentences and propositions, are regarded as of absolutely central importance. Professor Stead establishes beyond question the impossibility of adequately attacking the problem of substance in abstraction from that of the acceptability of an ontology understood as the attempt to give a comprehensive account of the concepts we find ourselves using in discourse concerning any subject-matter whatsoever, e.g. thing and quality, existence, truth, ground, etc. Clearly verbal and conceptual structures are closely related; but they are distinguishable, and it may be that in order to bring out completely the significance of the issues with which this book deals for contemporary theology, we need to grapple with the desperately difficult problem, not simply of word and being, but of the verbal and the conceptual. It is here, indeed, that Kant's work, especially in the *Analogies of Experience,* becomes extremely relevant.'

Two comments on that paragraph. In the first place, the reference to Moore is not unimportant. In his essay on Wisdom's *Paradox and*

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Discovery, MacKinnon noted that Wisdom is 'too much in debt to the ruthlessly honest meticulous realism of Moore to be bamboozled by the view (encouraged by a *superficial* adoption of some of Wittgenstein's styles), that religious belief has nothing to do with what is the case. If he has learnt the importance of flexibility in understanding what we think and say from Wittgenstein, he has also retained from Moore a healthy alertness to the depth of the distinction between what there is, and what there is not'.[24]

In the second place, MacKinnon took his preferred account of ontology from Peter Geach. Replying, during the 1951 Joint Session of the Aristotelian Society and the Mind Association, to Quine's paper 'On What There Is', Geach made 'some remarks on Quine's conception of ontological disagreement. He expresses the hope that people who disagree over ontology may find a basis of agreement by "withdrawing to a semantical plane" (p. 35). This hope seems to me illusory. People with different world-views will still differ when they talk about language, which is part of the world'. And he went on: 'Certain concepts, like *existence* and *truth* and *thing* and *property*, are used, and cannot but be used, in all rational discourse whatsoever; and ontology is an attempt to scrutinize our use of them. To be right or wrong in ontology means being clear or muddled about such fundamentals'.[25]

> 'If I spend time on this point, I do so because fundamentally I am in agreement with what I take to be Professor Stead's positive conclusion, namely that the theologian finds in ontology the means to protect himself against the besetting temptation of an all-embracing subjectivism. What he is trying to say, when he speaks of God, relates to what is the case. For myself, I find it safer to speak of God as "very ocean of being", or as "substance", rather than as "*a* substance". While sharing Professor Stead's insistence that Aristotle's theology shall be taken seriously, I am also inclined to give more sympathetic attention than he, to the implications of Gilson's plea that we find Thomas' most significant transformation of that theology in his work on the concept of existence. Yet this may be rightly regarded as a family dispute between two who agree in pleading the importance of the theologian's acceptance of the discipline of ontology. If he accepts this discipline, although his work may sometimes lead him to lose his way in a morass of technicalities, he will be recalled at the same time to an urgent sense that if his work has any significance, it is only as work concerned with what is.'

In discussion during a conference in which we both took part, some years ago, John Searle insisted to me that he was not an atheist, because to admit to being an atheist would entail admission that there was an issue here to be denied (or, by some strange group of cultural primitives,

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affirmed). For those of us for whom the question of God remains as central, and as fundamental, as it has ever been, it is becoming increasingly difficult to know how that question is best expressed, articulated, formulated, in a way that might make it *audible* to those of our contemporaries who share Searle's (historically quite explicable) prejudices and assumptions. Whether or not we deem the polarisation between 'religious experience' (or 'mysticism', or 'spirituality') construed as therapy or gnostic self-improvement, on the one hand and, on the other, the imagined security afforded by varieties of fundamentalism, as a degenerate rehearsal of the 'old controversy', it is not conducive to persuading people that the question of God might be a matter of comprehensive interest, public truth, and common duty.

Whatever one makes of the suggestion that, in ontology, theologians find their best 'protection' against such forms of self-indulgence, it is important to notice the insistence on the '*discipline* of ontology'. MacKinnon had learnt much not only from Aristotle and Kant, from Moore, and Wittgenstein, but also from Aquinas and Karl Barth. He understood, in other words, that the quality of what we *say* is decided by the quality of that disciplined *attentiveness* to 'what is' which, in all circumstances and at whatever cost, precedes, surrounds, and shapes our utterance.

'There is', says Fergus Kerr, 'a sense in which Wittgenstein' s work puts an end to metaphysics by inviting us to renew and expand our sense of wonder'.[26] A suggestion which chimes in well with the conclusion to one of MacKinnon's Gifford Lectures: 'Almost we must learn to make the strange into the merely (but emphatically not quite) trivial, in order to approach the unutterable profundities of the familiar, in order to learn to see that familiar anew, as indeed finding at its own level, but not out of its own resources, the means of its transformation'.[27]

> 'There is a great deal in this book to which there is no space to refer. It may therefore seem churlish to express regret for two omissions. But if I do so, it is because I regard this work as the most important contribution to appear in English for a very long time to the study at the deepest level of the development of Christian doctrine. Although it is wonderfully free of deliberate polemics, by its superb scholarly detachment it shows up the meretricious quality of a great deal of popular writing on this subject. It is for this reason that I must first express a certain regret that Professor Stead has not discussed the relationship between the concepts of substance and event, or found a place for reference to Dr W. E. Johnson's very interesting discussion of the "continuant" in the third volume of his *Logic*. The second omission is more important.'

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In spite of which, in ignorance of Johnson's work, I confine my comment to the first. Notwithstanding its brevity, I take this to be an indication that MacKinnon was quite as hostile as Kerr to that forgetfulness of temporality which has been, perhaps, the deepest flaw in so many modern versions of 'the metaphysical tradition', and of the science, and politics, and ethics, in which they found expression.

> 'Because this work moves at so fundamental a level and deals in so magisterial a way with issues of such importance, one lays it aside almost eager oneself to attempt the necessary sequel, yet aware how little equipped one is in comparison with the author of this book, to attempt it. This sequel would concern itself not with the validity, even the indispensability of the use of such notions as substance in theology, but with the limitations of their yield. If their presence ensures that we shall not dodge the issue of objective reference, even when we are concerned to speak of the unfathomable ultimates of God's self-giving in Christ, it also may put in peril attachment to the ultimate simplicities that Whitehead claimed towards the end of *Process and Reality*, were of Galilee rather than Jerusalem. Yet even as one acknowledges the need openly to face this peril in a possible sequel, one remembers that simplicity is itself arguably an ontological concept!
> But this review can only end with an expression of gratitude to Professor Stead for a work that is at once a treasurehouse of illuminations, and an urgent stimulus to the sort of resolutely fundamental thinking without which Christian theology can hardly hope to survive.'

The self-correcting pressures of trinitarian thinking were always at work in MacKinnon's theology, and it is no surprise that, at the end of a review so highly praising a study of the 'indispensability of the use of such notions as substance in theology', he should issue a warning of 'the limitations of their yield', and should do so in relation to the doctrine of the Cross, of 'the unfathomable ultimates of God's self-giving in Christ'.

During a session of his seminar in 1972, MacKinnon asked the (unscripted) question: 'Was there that which Jesus alone could do under the conditions in which it had to be done which was of such import for humanity that the risk was justified, the cost well spent?' In his work, reflection on the tragic was not so much an alternative to, as the very *form* of, exploration of the metaphysics of 'divine substance'. Near the end of the Giffords he wrote: 'We have to consider the suggestion that in tragedy we reach a form of representation that by the very ruthlessness of its interrogation enables us to project as does no available alternative, our ultimate questioning'.[28]

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What are we to make of metaphysics?

The date: a Friday in the early 1970s. The occasion: a meeting of Donald MacKinnon's seminar, the 'D' Society. Having been invited to address the Society, Dr Norman Pittenger delivered a paper on 'A Metaphysics of Love'. It was a warm-hearted encomium of 'process theology', punctuated by contemptuous dismissal of other metaphysical traditions. The chairman held his fire until a visitor from the United States was rash enough to sing a similar song. MacKinnon had had enough:

> 'Whenever I hear someone indulging in that kind of denunciation of classical metaphysical enquiry without any apparent prior comprehension of the issues involved, I am reminded of an occasion in Oxford, many years ago, when a distinguished Oxford philosopher (*not* Professor A. J. Ayer) was indulging in similar denunciation, and Sir Isaiah Berlin said that *he* was reminded of a man who had not had any breakfast attempting to vomit; a process as pointless as it is disgusting'.

It was, of course, quite inexcusable; an example of what I once described as MacKinnon's sometimes self-indulgent talent for denunciation.[29] But it was quite unforgettable, and it was (I must admit) enormous fun.

I am not, of course, for one moment suggesting that Fergus Kerr's hostility to metaphysics would have been likely to provoke a similar outburst. Whatever Fergus' *assessment* of the metaphysical tradition, he is as closely and comprehensively familiar with it as anyone I know. And yet, for me at least, a puzzle remains. For all the contrasts of style and temperament, there are deep consonances between the two men's philosophical interests and theological concerns. In the one case, however, these interests and concerns find expression in comprehensive disavowal of the metaphysical; in the other, in energetic and sometimes belligerent insistence on its indispensability.

While both speak about 'the metaphysical *tradition*', my impression is that Kerr would be less likely to characterize that tradition as 'a series of explorations' than as a set of 'commitments' that do most damage when they are, as they too often are, 'ignored or denied'.[30] I would find no difficulty in acknowledging that, historically, both versions of the metaphysical have been at work, endlessly and variously intertwining — shaping, for good and ill, the ways in which we think and work — but to suppose that Western metaphysics can be reduced to *either* strand (as Kerr's definitions would have us do) would seem itself to be an exercise, if not in just the kind of metaphysics which he deplores, then at least of an otherwise uncharacteristic apriorism.

Where the 'old controversy' is concerned, it is surely clear that MacKinnon, like Wittgenstein, was simultaneously 'radically non-

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idealist' and 'not an ordinary realist either'.[31] Earlier, I quoted Fergus Kerr's assertion that 'the metaphysical tradition just *is* the disavowal of the mundane world of conversation and collaboration in which human life consists'.[32] No-one who knew MacKinnon well would, I think, suspect him of such disavowal. As George Steiner put it, in an address in Cambridge after Donald's death: he was 'immersed in history, in historicity. He insisted on grounding theology and metaphysics in concrete material history ... He found it difficult to take seriously a body of philosophic thought that was innocent of the daily papers'.[33] And Rowan Williams, who spoke of 'his fear of any metaphysic that traded in the reconciliation of what could and should not be reconciled', moved to the heart of MacKinnon's theological concern: 'After 30 minutes [of a lecture], you were devastatingly aware that you needed to become more, not less, worried by evil as a theologian; that most available "solutions" were sophisticated ways of helping you to be untruthful about the reality of suffering; and that if the Christian vision had anything to contribute, it might be, not a consolatory word, but a recognition that tragedy was inbuilt into a contingent world. Not even Jesus' choices could be unshadowed: the triumph of the cross is the shipwreck of Judas and the beginning of the pathologies of anti-Semitism. Donald would not allow you to evade the particular, and his hostility to grand schemes that "answered" the problem of evil has much to do with this'.[34]

Fergus Kerr's work, like Donald MacKinnon's, consistently refuses to evade the particular, and is admirably and strenuously critical of the forces at work in our society which encourage and shape us in the direction of such evasion. So far, then, I do not think that my remarks amount to more than a request that, in his continued engagement in this struggle, he discriminates rather more than heretofore in his characterization of the 'metaphysical tradition', even if both Wittgenstein and Heidegger may have failed to do so!

There is, however, one last question that I would like to raise. Let us suppose that we had more or less succeeded in achieving the profound social, cultural and intellectual transformations that would be required if we were, in practice, effectively to 'dissolve' the 'old controversy' once and for all. Let us suppose, in other words, that we had, we might say, 'come to our senses', and laid the ghost of our dissociation from the world of which we form a part.

What, in these happy circumstances, would be the *forms* which the question of God — which is, amongst other things, a question about contingency, and change, and hope — might appropriately take? As we took up again, in whatever fresh figure, the exploration of the 'names' of God, would not that exploration be such as to continue to require consideration of issues which would be (in Donald MacKinnon' s sense,

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though not in Fergus Kerr's) 'ontological', 'metaphysical'? After all, Fergus Kerr himself, 'lifting' a phrase of Donald MacKinnon's, has said that 'we need many more practitioners of *the philosophy of theology*'.[35] Would we not, for example, need to continue to give painstaking consideration to questions concerning the 'grammar' of the word 'god' itself, and of the language of 'existence' in relation to the mystery of God? There are, of course, no short cuts in such enquiries: 'by remarking that theology is grammar, [Wittgenstein] is reminding us that it is only by listening to what we say about God (and what has been said for many generations), and to how what is said about God ties in with what we say and do in innumerable other connections, that we have any chance of understanding what we mean when we speak of God'.[36] Nevertheless, is it really only the 'adherents' of misplaced loyalties known as 'realism' and 'idealism' who 'believe that they are saying something specific about the essence of the world'?[37] Is this not *also* in some sense true of those who confess themselves disciples of the crucified and risen one?

In wishing Fergus every happiness on his seventieth birthday, and in gratitude for all that he has done so far, I hope that he may spend the next few years helping us to continue to address questions such as these.

1 Fergus Kerr, *Theology after Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p. viii.
2 Christopher Stead, *Divine Substance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).
3 Kerr, *Theology after Wittgenstein*, p. 122; see Fergus Kerr, 'Idealism and realism: an old controversy dissolved', *Christ, Ethics and Tragedy. Essays in Honour of Donald MacKinnon*, edited by Kenneth Surin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 15–33. I had been invited to chair the Cambridge conference but, unfortunately, was out of the country at the time.
4 *Theology after*, pp. 101, 103; the translators in question were C. G. Luckhardt and M. A. E. Aue.
5 *Ibid.*, pp. 102, 104–5.
6 *Ibid.*, pp. 108, 109.
7 *Ibid.*, pp. 114, 115.
8 *Ibid.*, pp. 118, 120, 121.
9 *Ibid.*, pp. 122, 123.
10 Donald MacKinnon, 'Idealism and Realism: an Old Controversy Renewed', *Explorations in Theology 5* (London: SCM Press, 1979), p. 138. The following essay in this collection, dating from 1977, was entitled: 'The Conflict between Realism and Idealism: Remarks on the significance for the philosophy of religion of a classical philosophical controversy recently renewed'.
11 Kerr, *Theology after*, pp. 135, 136.
12 *Ibid.*, pp. 136, 140.
13 Kerr, 'Idealism and realism: an old controversy dissolved', pp. 16, 20.
14 *Ibid.*, p. 21; the reference is to Renford Bambrough, 'Principia Metaphysica', *Philosophy*, 39 (1964), p. 103.
15 Donald MacKinnon, 'John Wisdom's *Paradox and Discovery*', *Borderlands*

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of Theology and Other Essays, edited by George W. Roberts and Donovan E. Smucker (London: Lutterworth Press, 1968), pp. 222, 223; the first clause of the second quotation is cited by Kerr in ' ... dissolved', p. 15. In his introductory essay to *Borderlands*, MacKinnon noted that 'in philosophy my chief concern has been with the question of the limits of experience, of intelligible, descriptive discourse, with the kind of questions discussed by Kant as that philosopher is presented in Mr P. F. Strawson's recent book *The Bounds of Sense* and by Professor Wisdom in some of the papers contained in *Paradox and Discovery*' (p. 21).

16 I do not remember any occasion at which MacKinnon pointed out that he was quoting Wittgenstein: 'We are up against one of the great sources of philosophical bewilderment: a substantive makes us look for a thing that corresponds to it' (*The Blue and Brown Books*, p. 1, quoted from Kerr, *Theology after*, p. 145).

17 Kerr, ' ... dissolved', p. 24; Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Remarks* (Oxford, 1975), p. 86, cited from Kerr, ' ... dissolved', p. 23.

18 Kerr, ' ... dissolved', p. 24.

19 *Ibid.*, pp. 25, 28.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 31, citing MacKinnon, ' ... an Old Controversy Renewed', p. 138.

21 D. M. MacKinnon, '"Substance" in Christology — a Cross-bench View', *Christ, Faith and History. Cambridge Studies in Christology*, edited by S. W. Sykes and J. P. Clayton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), pp. 279–300, p. 280.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 281.

23 Loc. cit.

24 MacKinnon, 'John Wisdom's *Paradox and Discovery*', p. 224. Kerr cited the phrase 'the ruthlessly honest meticulous realism of Moore' in ' ... dissolved', p.15

25 Peter Geach, 'Symposium: On What There Is', *Freedom, Language, and Reality*, Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume XXV (London: Harrison, 1951), pp. 134, 136. Amongst other instances of MacKinnon's paraphrases of this passage, see *The Problem of Metaphysics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1974), p. 96; 'The Relation of the Doctrines of the Incarnation and the Trinity', *Themes in Theology. The Three-fold Cord: Philosophy, Politics and Theology* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1987), pp. 145–167; p. 147.

26 Kerr, *Theology after*, p. 141.

27 MacKinnon, *The Problem of Metaphyics*, p. 121.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 136.

29 See my obituary of Donald MacKinnon in *The Guardian*, 5 March 1994.

30 MacKinnon, '"Substance" in Christology', p. 280'; Kerr, *Theology after*, p. 187.

31 Kerr, *Theology after*, pp. 118, 120; see note 8 above.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 140; see note 12 above.

33 George Steiner, 'Tribute to Donald MacKinnon', *Theology* (January/February 1995), pp. 2–9; pp. 2, 3.

34 Rowan Williams, obituary of Donald MacKinnon, *The Tablet*, 12 March 1994.

35 Kerr, *Theology after*, p. 171, paraphrasing MacKinnon, *Explorations in Theology*, p. 147.

36 Kerr. *Theology after*, pp. 147–148.

37 Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Remarks*, p. 86, cited from Kerr, ' ... dissolved', p. 23; see above at note 17.

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