DOI:10.1111/j.1741-2005.2008.01260.x

D. Z. Phillips and Classical Theism

William H. Brenner

> A religious question is either a question of living or it is empty chatter. This language game–one could say–gets played only with questions of life.
> [I]t is not a kind of *seeing* on our part; it is our *acting*, which lies at the bottom of the language game./ What has to be accepted, the given is–so one could say–*forms of life* . . . the fact that we act in such-and-such ways . . .
>
> –Wittgenstein[1]

This paper is an exposition and defense of D. Z. Phillips' "Wittgensteinian" approach to philosophy of religion, with special emphasis on important similarities and differences between his conception of theology and that of classical theism. Using terminology from the contemporary Thomist, Brian Davies,[2] I distinguish the "classical theism" of Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas, and (I would add) Hume's Demea from the "theistic personalism" of, for example, Richard Swinburne, Alvin Plantinga, and Hume's Cleanthes.

[1] *PPO, p. 211* and *OC*, sec. 204, *PI,* p. 226, *RPP-I,* sec. 630.
WITTGENSTEIN ABBREVIATIONS:
PPO = Public and Private Occasions, ed. James C. Klagge and Alfred Nordmann. New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003
OC = On Certainty, trans. Denis Paul and G. E. M. Anscombe. Oxford: Blackwell, 1969
PI = Philosophical Investigations, 2d Ed., trans. G. E. M. Anscombe. Oxford: Blackwell, 2001
RPP-I = Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology, Vol. I, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe. Oxford: Blackwell, 1980
TLP = Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, trans. D. F. Pears and BF. McGuinness. London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1961.
LC = Wittgenstein: Lectures and Coversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief, ed. Cyril Barrett. Oxford: Blackwell, 1966
NB = *Notebooks: 1914–1916*, 2nd Ed., trans. G. E. M Anscombe. Oxford: Blackwell, 1979
CV = Culture and Value, trans. Peter Winch. Oxford: Blackwell, 1980.

[2] Davies, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, 3d edn. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 2–15.

© The author 2008. Journal compilation © The Dominican Council/Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 2008, 9600 Garsington Road, Oxford OX4 2DQ, UK, and 350 Main Street, Malden MA 02148, USA

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2008.01260.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

"The Given"

A devout Christian trying to persuade an observant Jew that in Jesus the Messianic prophecies were fulfilled would refer to their common biblical heritage. Both would be discussing the Bible from a primarily *religious*, rather than a secular historical or literary perspective. The trouble is that it has come to seem natural to demand a justification of the religious perspective itself.

Religion has certainly looked problematic to mainstream Western intellectuals, at least since the Enlightenment. Even those friendly to religion have felt that religious thought and practice should be founded on reasons drawn from the secular life common to believers and non-believers alike. Many look to metaphysical theology for a foundation; others, at the opposite extreme, look to the hugely prestigious ideas and methods of modern science to provide a model for constructing an empirically-grounded theology. The efforts of Dewi Phillips were consistently directed against this and any other approach to religious practices and beliefs that claim they require a non-religious foundation. In other words, he opposes the commonly held assumption that religion *as such* needs a friendly spokesman to defend it before the so-called "bar of reason," that is, by way of the secular mind's own–empiricist, utilitarian, humanist, historical, or metaphysical–categories, values, and methods.

But what is Phillips calling "religion"? For a start, it can be said that religion, for Phillips, is a "family" of ways of living and of assessing life. Although these "ways," these practices, normally involve commitment to certain beliefs, the beliefs are not the *foundation* of the practices, since it is only in their context that they have the religious significance they do.

Our ways of living and judging, our "forms of life" as Wittgenstein calls them, are the contexts of all our distinctively human activities. We are "in the midst of them"–not related to them as their external knowers or creators: they are "the given" frames of reference within which we learn how to be agents, knowers, and makers. It is within these contexts that we are inducted into human practices, practices that include: "Giving orders, and obeying them; describing the appearance of an object, or giving its measurement … Forming and testing hypotheses; … asking, thanking, cursing, greeting, praying" (*PI*, sec. 23).

In learning to participate in these different but interrelated activities, we learned, among other things, what counts, in a given context, as good grounds for a knowledge-claim. Clearly then, in view of this, "the given" cannot itself be based on grounds. And so we do not earn or fail to earn the right to it, as we do with our knowledge-claims. "It is not reasonable (or unreasonable). It is there–like our life" (*OC*, sec. 559). Following Wittgenstein, Phillips argues against attempts

© The author 2008
Journal compilation © The Dominican Council/Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 2008

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2008.01260.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

to justify or reject our forms of life in the light of something more fundamental. *They*, fundamentally, are our light. Their logic needs no apology from us.

It is only by acknowledging that our human practices or "forms of life" are *givens* that philosophy can get beyond the "metaphysical doubt"or radical skepticism that has wreaked so much havoc in modern philosophy. And it is only in this way that we can hope to arrive at a clear philosophical understanding of what it is to respond religiously to the world.

A religion offers a way of thinking about our life-world as a whole–a way rooted, not in theory or bits of putative knowledge, but in a kind of response or reaction to the everyday world of human life and practice. It is no part of Phillips' argument that there *must* or *ought* to be a religious reaction to this "given"–this would be precisely the sort of foundationalism he persistently rejects. The job of the philosopher of religion, as he sees it, is to note the existence of distinctively religious reactions and to do justice to their place in human life.

Religion, as Phillips sees it, is rooted in a range of reactions to the world as we find it, with all its unfathomable vicissitudes. One such reaction to this "given" is that of acceptance. Our life, our being in the world, is seen as a free, unearned and–yes–amazing grace. And some of us learn to express gratitude for this gift when we learn how to thank God in prayer. Nourished by religious instruction, the initial reaction may grow into a way of being in the world–"a faith to live by." Such a faith will become for the believer part of that "given" for which she thanks God in prayer.

A contrasting response to the inescapable, often painful vicissitudes of life is to protest against them, "to shake a fist at the heavens." People who respond in this way may be prepared to speak of a capricious god. That god is the spirit in which these people live and move.[3]

Both the religion of acceptance and the religion of protest are to be contrasted with modes of life rooted in the sort of ho-hum reaction to the contingencies of life expressed in Euripides: "It is simply a banal truth that human affairs are likely to prove unpredictably ruinous."[4] Many will say that such a non-religious response to the contingencies of life is the only honest and reasonable one. That view, for Phillips, represents an excessively narrow conception of what being a reasonable, honest person requires. He thinks that the tendency in modern intellectuals to reject religion wholesale is symptomatic of spiritual blindness. He sees his task as a philosopher of religion to bring to

[3] *Wittgensteinian Fideism?* (London: SCM Press, 2005), p. 177.

[4] Quoted on p. 37 of Phillips' *Religion and the Hermeneutics of Contemplation.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

© The author 2008
Journal compilation © The Dominican Council/Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 2008

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2008.01260.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

light possibilities of religious life that are neither unreasonable nor dishonest.

"Outside the World"

Although he acknowledges, indeed emphasizes the *varieties* of religious belief, Phillips draws his main examples from the biblical tradition's conception of divine reality. In this tradition, "the divine" is identified with a creator-God said to be "outside the world." But what can that possibly mean? Phillips says that we need to look beyond that paradoxical combination of words to what it might mean, *in practice*, to believe in "a God beyond the world." To have such a belief, he suggests, is to renounce worldliness, egocentricity, and hubristic pride–a renunciation linked with seeing one's life as something undeserved, "a gift of grace," and one's way of living as something to be assessed by "godly"ideals of purity and holiness.[5]

For some believers, God is also "other than the world" in being supernatural, *supernatural* in a sense explained by one of Phillips favorite spiritual writers, Simone Weil. Using a famous example from Thucydides, Weil says that the Athenians who massacred the inhabitants of Melos no longer had a conception of a supernatural God. She claimed that theirs was a false religion–but by what criterion? Phillips quotes her answer, as follows:

> The first proof that they were in the wrong lies in the fact that, contrary to their assertion, it happens, although extremely rarely, that a man will forbear out of pure generosity to command where he has the power to do so. That which is possible for man is possible also for God.[6]

[5] "What is God?"–"An eternal measure?"–"What's *that*?"–"A subsistent ideal."–"A *what*?"... If we want to avoid going down that dark metaphysical road–as Phillips certainly did–then I think we need to begin by substituting a Wittgensteinian, "grammatical"question about the religious use of the word *God* for the traditional "*What* is God?" formulation. As part of his own grammatical investigation, Phillips suggests that "God," along with the picture of divine judgment associated with it, functions as a "mirror in which we see and judge ourselves." (*Religion and the Hermeneutics of Contemplation*, p. 105). In view of this, we can say that the grammar of "God" is comparable–up to a point–with the grammar of such words as "standard, "measure," "ideal," and (even) "mirror." Phillips also explains that this "eternal measure" is spoken of in personal terms (as "our heavenly Father," for example) because that "answerability" must be mediated in the personal details of our lives: "The importance of 'the personal' is found in the fact that to engage with the love and grace of which I have spoken *is* to engage with the personal, not with blind causal forces" (from a ms. Phillips sent me: "Wittgensteinianism: Wittgenstein, Logic, Metaphysics and God"). He fleshes-out this rather thin explanation in (among other places) chap. 21of *From Fantasy to Faith*, where he makes illuminating use of a Flannery O'Connor short story. (See also Gareth Moore's *Believing in God (Edinburgh:* T. & T. Clark, 1988), pp. 42–45 and *passim*.).

[6] Simone Weil, *Waiting For God* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), p. 144.

© The author 2008
Journal compilation © The Dominican Council/Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 2008

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2008.01260.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

Commenting on that passage, Phillips asks, "What other proof of truth in religion could one ever ask for or hope to possess?"[7]

Simone Weil's criterion for true religion is surely of a piece with St. Anselm's conception of the truly and fully divine as "that than which none greater can be conceived." We will be looking at Phillips' "grammatical" interpretation of Anselm's famous argument in the next section, and, in the section following that, at a cosmological argument inspired by another major philosopher of classical theism, St. Thomas Aquinas. Fundamental to Aquinas' philosophical theology is the distinction between God and the world, Creator and creation. For Aquinas, God alone is *uncreated*, and is in that sense "outside the world" or "supernatural." It will be my contention that Phillips fails to do justice to that aspect of classical theism's notion of divine reality.

"Theology as Grammar"

"All that theology can do is try to indicate, perhaps even with some sort of formal proof, what it is correct to say, what is the correct way of speaking about God" (Rush Rhees).[8] This Wittgensteinian, "grammatical" conception of theology is nicely illustrated by what Phillips gathers from St. Anselm.

The ontological argument was part of Anselm's effort to understand what he *already* believed. What kind of understanding was he seeking? Following Norman Malcolm's lead, Phillips answers that he sought and achieved an insight into the *kind* of reality believers are referring to when speaking of God.

What Anselm's reasoning brings out is that God's existence is not to be spoken of in the way we speak of the existence of things in space and time, things which come to be and pass away. We are not to ask how long God has existed, whether he still exists, or what caused his existence. What Anselm demonstrates is that *necessary existence,* i.e., eternity, is part of the grammar of the word "God," as he and his community of believers use it.[9]

[7] *Recovering Religious Concepts* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), p. 90.

[8] *Rush Rhees on Religion and Philosophy*, ed. D. Z. Phillips (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 44. As his teacher and colleague, Rhees was a major infuence on Phillips' thinking about religion.

[9] Anselm is bringing out this distinction when, in the so-called second version of his ontological argument of *Proslogion*, chap. 3, he argues that it would be contradictory to say that God, defined as "that, than which nothing greater [more perfect] can be conceived," could (like any object) be conceived *not* to exist; for that would imply that God is *not* that, than which nothing greater can be conceived. In other words: Anselm came to understand that without eternal, necessary existence, the God he believed in could not be the supremely perfect Reality "than which nothing greater can be conceived."

© The author 2008
Journal compilation © The Dominican Council/Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 2008

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2008.01260.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

Our understanding of concepts is shown in the use we make of them. But to reflect on the use we make of a concept, we must locate it in its natural surroundings. Phillips suggests that the natural surroundings of the concept of necessary existence include the way believers talk of divine love and divine judgment:

> To say that God loves is not to say that he could be malicious but, as a matter of fact, happens to be loving . . . . "God is love" gives us a rule for the use of the word "God." The judgment of God's love is said to be a *necessary judgment.* For it makes no sense to speak of avoiding it. Separation from God is not the contingent consequence of sin. Sin *is* separation from God. The relation between sin and separation is a necessary one. The eternal destiny of the human soul is said to be determined by the relation in which it stands to the divine.[10]

It might be thought that believing in God's love or judgment *presupposes* believing in his necessary existence. Phillips denies this, asking us to consider the following analogy:

> We do not first believe in the reality of physical objects so that, with confidence, we may sit on chairs, set table, climb chairs, etc. Rather, what we mean by the reality of physical objects is shown in such activities. Similarly, we do not presuppose God's necessary existence in order to talk of his love and judgment. Rather, it is such talk which gives sense to talk of God's necessary existence. . . . [11]

Both belief in the existence of a physical reality and belief in a spiritual, divine reality show themselves in our activities. But the former belief is impersonal in the way the latter is not. To lose, in practice, one's confidence in the reality of the physical is to lose one's mind, and with it one's capacity to participate fully in any form of human life. ("The reasonable man does *not have* certain doubts" [*OC*, sec. 220]). In contrast, to lose, in practice, one's confidence in the reality of the divine is to abandon a faith, i.e., a particular way of living and assessing life.

The question "*Whether* there is an eternal God?" is what Kierkegaard–another of Phillips' heroes–called an existential question. But an existential question is idle if unrelated to choosing and embracing a way of living and assessing life. Conceptual elucidation, such as that provided by Anselm's arguments, cannot, therefore, answer it for you:

> Anselm's proof [Phillips continues] ends in praise: "And this thou art, O Lord our God." But philosophical, i.e., grammatical clarification need not end in this praise. Acknowledgment of God is a *religious*

[10] From "Sublime Existence," chap. 2 in *Wittgenstein and Religion* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), p. 17.

[11] *Ibid*., p. 17.

© The author 2008
Journal compilation © The Dominican Council/Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 2008

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2008.01260.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

> acknowledgment. Belief in God makes no sense apart from some affective state or attitude. These states and attitudes range from reverential praise and love to blasphemy and rebellion. . . . [12]

Phillips compares his "grammatical" conception of theology with Ludwig Feuerbach's. He agrees with Feuerbach's famous remark that "he alone is the true atheist to whom the predicates of the divine being – for example, love, wisdom, justice–are nothing"; he also agrees with Feuerbach in rejecting any theology that would construe divine love, wisdom, etc. as attributes of an ineffable, immaterial subject. His complaint is that Feuerbach was not as free from the "metaphysical subject" as he supposed. For, "as a result of rejecting it, he concluded that we come to recognize that the so-called divine predicates are *human* attributes." The problem, Phillips continues, is that

> no being in addition to human beings, and certainly not one thought of as a super-human being, could fill the logical space the divine is said to occupy. No individual can be the element, the light, the spirit, in which we live, and move, and have our being, if only because one wants to ask, "and what about the life of *that* individual?"[13]

Phillips refers to the divine predicates as *grammatical*, implying that there is no "something" of which they are predicated. Thus he regards *God is love*, for example, "as a grammatical rule in dogmatics: it gives us one use of the word 'God', just as 'Generosity is good' gives us one rule for the use of 'good', and is not a predicate of what G. E. Moore took to be 'an undefinable subject'." [14]

Classical Theism?

An outstanding contemporary defender of the classical theism of Thomas Aquinas, Brian Davies is one of Phillips' more sympathetic critics. I think he would say that the preceding account of the divine attributes may be making much the same point Aquinas made when he argued that there is no real distinction between God's substance and his nature, so that God is more properly said to *be* love than a Somebody who happens to have a loving nature.

According to Phillips, believing in God is responding to the givenness of life as a grace. What he would reject in classical theism is the urge to rationalize this response. For he sees the reaction in question

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 19.

[13] Sorry to say, I lost the exact reference for this quote. For Phillips' major discussion of Ludwig Feuerbach, see chap. 4 of *Religion and the Hermeneutics of Contemplation.* Cf. *Through a Darkening Glass* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982), especially pp. 148–149.

[14] *The Problem of Evil and the Problem of God* (SCM Press: London, 2004), p. 95.

© The author 2008
Journal compilation © The Dominican Council/Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 2008

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2008.01260.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

as what Wittgenstein calls a "proto-phenomenon" (*PI*, sec. 183)–that is, as lying at the *root* of believers' talk of God, so that in trying to prop it up, one misses its foundational significance. That some people *do* respond in this way–regarding their response as *itself* a gift of grace—is a fact philosophers are called upon, not to explain or justify but to describe.

Classical theists claim to be able to justify the proposition "God exists" through an inference from the contingent existence of the cosmos ("the gift") to the necessary existence of its cause ("the giver"). Now while Phillips allows no justificatory role for that cosmological argument, or any of the "theistic proofs," he does, as we saw, allow that a version of Anselm's ontological argument has an important *concept-forming* or *concept-elucidating* function. If he goes wrong in his discussions of natural theology, I think it is in failing to see a like role for a cosmological argument.

The cosmological argument I have in mind (one that Aquinas took over from Avicenna and made a foundation stone of his own natural theology) begins with an expression of wonder at the very existence of the world: *Why does the world exist*? I want to refer to this, using a *Tractatus* phrase, as "the riddle of life in space and time." And I want to suggest that, as with other riddling questions, the very meaning of this riddle remains unclear or undetermined until something is proposed that we're prepared to acknowledge as its solution.[15] Now Aquinas' proposal is that, since the world in which we find ourselves certainly doesn't exist by its very nature, it must therefore depend for its existing on something that *does* so exist.[16] And this, he concludes, is what we call *God*.

It turns out, however, that Aquinas' "solution" is at least as much of a riddle as the one we started with. For (as Davies himself stresses) the existence of the world is a mystery, then it is an even greater mystery what it means for essence and existence to be identical in the Creator. If the cosmological argument gives us an explanation of the world's existence, it is an explanation that actually *deepens* the mystery of existence, and helps keeps it alive. So it is to be sharply contrasted with scientific explanation, the function of which is to dispel mystery, or push it back.[17]

[15] Compare Cora Diamond's discussion of Wittgenstein and riddles *in The Realistic Spirit* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 1991), especially pp. 267–289.

[16] Davies argues that when Aquinas says that God's existing is not other than his essence he is not committed to the dubious proposition that existence is a defining property of somebody called "God." His point is that, "given the appropriateness of asking 'How come the universe as opposed to nothing?', one cannot reply by referring to something to which the same question equally applies. . . . " (*The Reality of God and the Problem of Evil* [London: Continuum, 2006], p. 107).

[17] Cf. *TLP,* 6.372: "People today stop at the laws of nature, treating them as something inviolable, just as God and Fate were treated in past ages. . . . [T]he view of the ancients is

© The author 2008
Journal compilation © The Dominican Council/Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 2008

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2008.01260.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

So is the preceding argument to be thrown on the scrap heap of failed justifications and pseudo-explanations? I think not. For I think the "we" in its concluding line ("And this we call *God*") suggests that it can be seen not as an attempt to refute atheism but as effort of faith seeking a clearer understanding of itself. Seen in this way, its audience is not religiously neutral metaphysicians but believers—believers whose God, *as contrasted with the gods of the pagans,* for instance–is known as "Creator of heaven and earth." This biblical God is said to be the source of everything that exists. Worshiping him is inseparable from grateful acceptance of the existence of the world as a whole, and from the ascription of a measure of intrinsic value or dignity to everything it contains. The pagan gods, by contrast, were not thought to be the source of everything real. Although their worship (as I understand it) was inseparable from reverence for the elementary powers of nature and for certain spiritual ideals, it did not include reverence for the *existence* of things as such.

The cosmological argument is of value–or so I want to say–in that it helps formalize the essential, conceptual connection between cosmological wonder and the creator-God many believers worship. Thus understood–as a contribution to theological grammar–I think Phillips could have been brought to accord it a value comparable to that he ascribed to Anselm's argument.

(Explaining how, as a child, he developed an idea of God for himself, G. K. Chesterton writes that he wanted to have someone to thank not only for the presents in his Christmas stockings but also for the feet he put in his stockings every day. Belief in God for Chesterton, as for Phillips and for many believers, is inseparable from a kind of gratitude for "the gift of life."[18] The "Giver" he came to thank didn't function as *explanation* of his life–as generous parents accounted for the Christmas presents–but as an expression of what might be called cosmic gratitude. "Life is a gift; all gifts have a giver; therefore, there is a giver of life." Phillips would surely have preferred this Chestertonian syllogism to a Thomistic cosmological argument, inasmuch as we are much less likely to read it as explanatory or justificatory in intent.)

"But *is* there a such a God to be worshiped?" Brian Davies, following Aquinas, claims the right to say with certainty that the proposition, "God exists" is indeed true. He does not think that its truth is that of an empirical hypothesis, believed (because it has withstood all efforts to falsify it) to correspond to "the way things go." His claim is that "we have positive reason for saying not only that God exists

clearer in so far as they have a clear and acknowledged terminus [of explanation], while the modern system tries to make it look as if *everything* were explained."

[18] See chap. 4 of *Orthodoxy.* Cf. my "Chesterton, Wittgenstein, and the Foundations of Ethics", *Philosophical Investigations* 14:4 (1991), pp. 311–323.

© The author 2008
Journal compilation © The Dominican Council/Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 2008

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2008.01260.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

(as accounting for there being something rather than nothing) but that goodness, perfection and love can be ascribed to him literally . . . ."[19] He thinks these theological conclusions follow from premises we "ought to concede to be true".

After reading Davies, I am no longer sure that Phillips was right in thinking that Hume succeeded in demonstrating the logical bankruptcy of natural theology.[20] But I still think he was right in holding that what actually sustains belief in a Creator for a community of believers is the religious life that surrounds it, rather than any "reasonable" premises from which it might be shown to follow. I also agree with his argument that "the proofs" couldn't possibly function to ground or justify religious practice, since any religious significance they have presupposes a context of religious practice (worship, thanksgiving, sacrifice, etc.).

Speaking of Michelangelo's painting of God's creating Adam, Wittgenstein remarked that a religion might be taught by means of it. To the inevitable philosophical question, "But does it *correspond to reality*?," Wittgenstein replied:

> I could show Moore the pictures of a tropical plant. There is a technique of comparison between picture and plant. If I showed him the picture of [God by] Michelangelo and said: "Of course, I can't show you the real thing, only the picture" . . . . The absurdity is, I've never taught him the technique of using this picture. (*LC*, p. 63)

[19] Davies, *The Reality of God and the Problem of Evil*, p. 224.

[20] Hume thought that to speak of "*necessary* existence"or "what exists *by its very nature*" is to use words without meaning. Brian Davies would respond by explaining that when Aquinas spoke in those terms he meant that "God cannot be something the existence of which is *derived*." *I posed the following question to Davies*: Supposing that, in fact, something exists whose existence is underived: why call this "something" *necessarily* existent? I see just two possibilities: *first*, that "necessary existence" is just another term for "underived existence,"adding nothing to its meaning; *second*, that it is supposed to refer to what *accounts* for underived existence. If he wants to say the latter then it looks like he is going in the circle of first explaining "necessary existence" in terms of "underived existence"and then "underived existence" in terms of "necessary existence." *He replied:* "My point is just that if something exists by nature (and is therefore not something the existence of which is derived from something else), then it cannot not exist and is, in this sense, 'necessary.' I take 'exists by nature' to be just equivalent to 'cannot not exist.' This does *not* mean that there has to be anything that exists by nature. [T]o say that in God essence and existence are identical . . . is to say that whatever God is he cannot be something derived or something which might fail to exist. (I am supposing that this way of speaking does not commit one to supposing that existence is some kind of property with which God is to be identified)." *I replied:* You say *both* that what necessarily exists (i.e., exists by nature) cannot be something that might fail to exist *and* that this doesn't mean there *has to be* anything that exists by nature. It occurs to me that his this is the gist of Aquinas' objection to Anselm's argument. *If* something exists by nature, then it can't be something that might fail to exist. Yes. But, contrary Anselm, there is no *a priori* basis for affirming that antecedent. So it looks like we need to reject the criticism that the cosmological argument commits the same fallacy as that commonly ascribed to the ontological argument, namely that of trying to infer the real existence of something from a purely *a priori* premise. *Davies*: I've no problem with what you've written. But it makes an awfully long footnote!

© The author 2008
Journal compilation © The Dominican Council/Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 2008

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2008.01260.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

To understand a picture of a beetle you must know how to compare it with the depicted beetle. *Such* know-how is no part of the everyday use of the religious picture. To philosophers who take this as a deficiency in everyday God-talk, Phillips would ask if they are not perhaps measuring it by an alien criterion of truth or reference:

> It is, of course, important to know whether our beliefs correspond to reality. Unless there were an independent check on our beliefs, anything could be said to be true … It is important to note, however, that how they are checked depends on the kind of beliefs they are. This is not simply 'given' prior to any context. … Saint Paul insists that spirits must be tested to see whether they are of God. The Gospel says that if a man claims to love God, but hates his brother, he is a liar. … So, [it is not only in science that] there is a difference between what is the case, and what is thought to be the case. But the difference between the two cases is important. Think of the difference between deciding whether a person is walking alone or with another person, and deciding whether a person is walking with God.[21]

It seems to Phillips that most philosophers ignore the spiritual contexts in which God-talk has its life. They try to understand it on what Wittgenstein calls "the model of object and designation," concluding that "God" must refer to something like a human being–albeit invisible and imperceptible–and proceed to look for evidence from which they might infer the existence of this "something" or "someone." Phillips' view is that these philosophers are being led away from the real foundations of religion by a metaphysical will-o-the-wisp. Who are these philosophers? Hume's Cleanthes would certainly be on Phillips' list, as well as contemporary "theistic personalists" such as Richard Swinburne and Alvin Plantinga. As for classical theists, such as Brian Davies, they seem to be an intermediate case: on the one hand rejecting, with Phillips a (semi-)anthropomorphic model for understanding God-talk, while on the other hand insisting, unlike Phillips, on the need for, and possibility of, a theoretical foundation of religious worship, in the form of an inference to a "wholly other" efficient cause of the cosmos.

Evil and Divine Causality

In *The Problem of Evil and the Problem of God* (2004), Phillips argues against the idea of God as a moral agent. In *The Reality of God and the Problem of Evil* (2006), Brian Davies supplements Phillips' critique with arguments from Aquinas. He endorses Phillips' characterization of typical contemporary theodicies as "reading like

[21] *Religion and the Hermeneutics of Contemplation,* p. 291.

© The author 2008
Journal compilation © The Dominican Council/Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 2008

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2008.01260.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

end-of-term reports on God's performance," adding that such discussions confuse the Creator with one of his creatures, thereby committing an idolatrous category mistake. He "finds it hard to believe that God can be justified for dealing with real people according to what D. Z. Phillips calls 'the logic of economic management, the calculus of gain and loss'."[22] Perhaps it is here, in their opposition to an essentially anthropomorphic conception of God and the morally questionable theodicies it generates, that we find the most consequential agreement between these two philosophers of religion.[23]

Many recent philosophers and theologians seem to think of God as a supremely powerful agent who allows his creatures to suffer as a means to such-and-such an end: he *could* do something about the sufferings if he wanted to–but doesn't, for such and such morally sufficient reasons. If Davies is right, Phillips is at one with Aquinas and other classical theists in rejecting this way of dealing with the problem of evil.

How does Phillips deal with the problem? He thinks the only adequate response is to renounce the notion of a God of absolute power. His argument, to put it very briefly, is that unless we jettison this notion, "the problem of evil will retain its misleading form, and the effort to find instrumentalist solutions to it will persist."[24]

Could God have prevented the Holocaust? Too many theists answer that God could have done something to eliminate such horrors–but didn't, perhaps in order to test our faith in him. Phillips thinks this "turns the conception of God into a creator who experiments with his creatures for his own glorification," arguing that in order to exorcize this blasphemous idea,

> we need to conceive God's relation to the world as ... a spiritual relation, not one of power and control.... If this notion is embraced, the "cannot" in the claim that God cannot have prevented the Holocaust would be seen as a grammatical or logical "cannot." ...[25]

Phillips suggests that what needs emphasizing is the text proclaiming that God is love. He thinks that if we take this text seriously we must conclude "that God does not have two separate and distinct attributes, power and love, but that the power God has or is, *is* the power of love." We will then no longer demand instrumentalist

[22] *The Reality of God and the Problem of Evil*, pp. 103 and 131.

[23] From a letter to me from Brian Davies: "You are dead right to say that what links me to Phillips is a critique of anthropomorphism. He saw it that way too, which is why he organized a Claremont conference based on an article of mine in which I deplore anthropomorphism in contemporary philosophy of religion while giving good marks to Phillips on this score. See Davies' "Letter from America" in *New Blackfriars*, 84:989 (2003), pp. 371–84.

[24] The Problem of Evil and the Problem of God, pp. 226–227.

[25] *Ibid.,* pp. 226–27.

© The author 2008
Journal compilation © The Dominican Council/Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 2008

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2008.01260.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

solutions to the problem of evil, realizing that "love has no power external to itself to guarantee its success."[26]

Classical theists will object that the preceding proposal implies a much-too-narrow conception of divine omnipotence. They might say that, in equating God's power to the necessarily non-coercive, "beckoning" power of perfect love, Phillips has eliminated efficient causality from the divine nature, reducing God's power to that of a final cause–a mere ideal.

"A mere ideal"? Phillips would surely object to that. He would resist subjectivizing the notion of divine reality by calling it "*merely* ideal." And I want to suggest that here he might have again welcomed the assistance of Simone Weil–and, in particular, of the following argument:

> I have not the principle of rising in me. . . . It is only by directing my thoughts toward something better than myself that I am drawn upwards by this something. If I am really raised up, this something is real./ No imaginary perfection can draw me upwards even by the fraction of an inch. For an imaginary perfection is automatically at the same level as I who imagine it . . . [27]

Weil's "principle of rising" is an ideal of purity and holiness serving both as a standard by reference to which individuals measure themselves and as an object of worshipful attention and humble aspiration. (Compare with Phillips' remark that, "from one point of view, 'God' expresses all that we are not."[28])

But to what are the terms "principle of rising" and "God" supposed to refer (taking them to be equivalent here)? Not to any physical object, of course. And, if not to a subjective entity, "a mere ideal"–then to *what*? A classical theist such as Aquinas might suggest they refer to a *subsistent* ideal–something "which causes in all other things their being, their goodness, and whatever other perfection they have" (*Summa Theologiae*, "the fourth way"). To me, however, and I think to Phillips, a metaphysical account such as that would add nothing intelligible to Weil's "experimental ontological argument." And I take it that what her argument accomplishes is nothing more or less than explaining what it might mean to speak of the *reality* of a "godly" ideal. It might mean acknowledging its *authority* as a supreme measure: using it, in practice, to *judge* "worldly values" and *assess* one's own life. The idea here is that one cannot be acknowledging the authority of such an ideal while at the same time thinking of it as a mere figment of the human imagination.

[26] *Ibid.,* pp. 199–200.
[27] *Gravity and Grace*, p. 90.
[28] *Religion and the Hermeneutics of Contemplation,* p. 105.

© The author 2008
Journal compilation © The Dominican Council/Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 2008

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2008.01260.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

Developing her argument, Weil claims that "what is thus brought about by directing my thought is in no way comparable to suggestion":

> If I say to myself every morning "I am courageous . . .," I may become courageous, but not with a courage which conforms to what, in my present imperfection, I imagine under that name,. . . . It can only be a modification on the same plane, not a change of plane./ A sensitive person who by suggestion becomes courageous hardens himself . . . Grace alone can give courage while leaving the sensitivity intact.[29]

But how does Simone Weil knows that grace alone can give such courage? Couldn't there be another explanation? Phillips would surely reply that she is to be understood not as proposing a causal explanation of that courage (on the model of "steroids alone could account for that athlete's performance"), but rather as explaining what it might *mean* to speak of something as "a gift of divine grace" or "gift of God." In other words, he would construe Weil's statement that grace alone can give such courage as what Wittgenstein called "a grammatical remark," rather than as what it might seem to be–an empirically falsifiable hypothesis.

Reductionism?

Voicing a common criticism of Phillips, Kai Nielsen accuses him of reducing religious belief to "a passionate orientation of one's life."[30] Phillips agrees with Nielsen that without God or another "spiritual reality" as object of this passionate orientation, it is really a secular or "worldly" orientation. What he denies is that the object of the believer's orientation must be construed "on the model of object and designation," as something just like a visible, natural object—except for being invisible and preternaturally powerful:

> Every object of belief is not an object. . . . / When the Israelites came out Egypt, they are said to have traveled as people who had *seen the invisible.* What does that mean? . . . 'The invisible' refers to the things of the spirit. . . ./ Coming to see that there is a divine reality is not like coming to see that an additional being exists. If it were, there would be an extension of one's knowledge of facts, but no extension of one's understanding.[31]

Following Wittgenstein, Phillips thinks of religious belief–when unconfused and not superstitious–as an extension of ethics rather

[29] *Gravity and Grace,* p. 90.
[30] *Wittgensteinian Fideism?,* p. 323.
[31] *Ibid.,* pp. 370 and 221.

© The author 2008
Journal compilation © The Dominican Council/Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 2008

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2008.01260.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

than of natural science–as meta-morals rather than meta-physics. He denies, however, that he is thereby reducing religion to morality:

> Faced by the contingencies of life, especially the way the wicked often prosper and the good get hurt, a person may show a moral resolution which may be described as a form of patience.... But this is not the religious response. There is one thing missing from it–a sense of grace.... When [the believer] sees betrayal on the part of others, he will say, "But for the grace of God, there go I," and when he is guilty of such betrayal himself, [his] hope of redemption is in that gracious mercy which he is invited to accept ...[32]

Phillips also rejects Nielsen's interpretation of Wittgenstein's remark that "to pray is to think about the meaning of life" (*NB*, p. 73):

> [I]t cannot be said [*pace* Nielsen] that Wittgenstein is trying to *reduce* prayer to *something else* called "the meaning of life." Rather, Wittgenstein is showing that in the language of prayer we are offered a language in which to understand the whole of life. To pray is one form of recognition that life is a gift of the gods or God.[33]

At this point Nielsen would say that prayer has either a confused metaphysical or dubious anthropomorphic presupposition, namely the existence of God or gods. Phillips, in reply, would say that it is only through understanding spiritual practices such as prayer that we understand what "believing in the reality of God or the gods" amounts to.[34] The following Wittgensteinian analogy may be helpful here: it is only through understanding the various practices involved in human relations that we come to understand what "believing in the

[32] *Introducing Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), pp. 162–63.

[33] *Wittgensteinian Fideism?,* pp. 287–88.

[34] Cf. Peter Winch, quoted in Phillips, ed., *Can Religion Be Explained Away*? (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), p. 284:

> You say that people wouldn't use religious concepts unless they believed that God exists? But then what is the context for this belief? If you answer–as I think you should–'a religious context,' then we have an example of ... thought trying to catch its own tail." [paraphrased]

and cf. Fergus Kerr, *Theology After Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Blackwell's, 1986), p. 183:

> It is because people exult and lament, sing for joy, bewail their sins and so on, that they are able, eventually, to have thoughts about God. Worship is not the result but the precondition of believing in God. Theological concepts, like all concepts are rooted in certain habitual ways of acting, responding, relating, to our natural-historical setting. The very idea of God depends on such brute facts as that, in certain circumstances, people cannot help shuddering with awe or shame, and so on.... [I]f we cannot imagine what it is to observe rites, enjoy singing hymns and the like, the nature of religion is bound to remain opaque.

© The author 2008
Journal compilation © The Dominican Council/Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 2008

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2008.01260.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

reality of other minds" amounts to. In neither case do we need to "get behind the practice to its transcendent ground"–some inaccessible and therefore otiose "beetle in a box."

What about petitionary prayer? It will be objected that religious people think of prayer as a way bending the course of nature to their desires through appeal to an occult, preternatural agency. Judging from *The Concept of Prayer*, his first book, Phillips would reply that that describes a *deviant*–if all-too-common–form of a religious practice. He could have accepted Aquinas' remark that "we do not pray in order to change the divine disposition, but that we may ask for that which God has arranged to be granted"[35] as an apt description of a non-deviant form of petitionary prayer.

Religion Without Explanation

D. Z. Phillips was among the first to apply Wittgenstein's methods of conceptual clarification to religion, and to appreciate the seminal value of his few scattered remarks on the subject. And he came closer, I think, than anyone else to bringing a Wittgensteinian philosophy of religion to full flower. In this section my procedure is to quote a short passage or two from Wittgenstein and then explain how Phillips might explain or develop the thoughts they suggest.

*

> A proof of God's existence ought really to be something by means of which one could convince oneself that God exists. But I think that what *believers* who have furnished such proofs have wanted to do is give their 'belief' an intellectual analysis and foundation, although they themselves would never have come to believe as a result of such proofs. (*CV*, p. 85)

To natural theologians who think "the proofs" reveal the foundation in *knowledge* of what most religious people "merely believe," Wittgenstein and Phillips would suggest that the real foundation of religious faith is something *pre-epistemic*–namely, certain practices, and the reactions in which they're rooted. If we follow Wittgenstein and Phillips, we will try to read the "proofs" of classical theism as efforts more of faith seeking understanding than of faith seeking justification. Criticizing what he calls religious rationalism, Phillips argues that "it is not the proofs that ground faith, but faith which breathes into the proofs whatever life they had. If the sense of that faith is eroded, the proofs, cut off from it, become empty gestures."[36]

In his several discussions of Hume's *Dialogues*, Phillips' main concern is to refute the "experimental," anthropomorphic theism of

[35] *Summa Theologiae*, 2a-2ae. lxxxiii.2.

[36] *Religion and the Hermeneutics of Contemplation,* p. 30.

© The author 2008
Journal compilation © The Dominican Council/Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 2008

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2008.01260.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

Cleanthes. He says less about Demea's so-called "argument *a priori*"–a version of the cosmological argument comparable to the Thomistic argument discussed earlier. To be sure, Phillips levels logical objections against both sorts of argument. But he would agree, I think, that Demea's reasoning–and the "mystical," non-anthropomorphic theism it was meant to support–is less likely than Cleanthes' argument to undermine the religious significance of theism. As I suggested earlier, it may even be of help in distinguishing the God of the Bible from the gods of the ancient Greeks.

*

> If someone who believes in God looks round and asks "Where does everything I see come from, "Where does all this come from?," he is *not* craving for a (causal) explanation ... (*CV*, p. 85)

The believer is expressing amazement at the existence of "all this," an amazement not to be diverted by the Big Bang theory or any other cosmological hypothesis. When he says "*God* created it all," he is further expressing this amazement, this "wonder at the miracle of existence." But is he not *also* wanting to say that God *causes* the existence of the world? I think many modern philosophers, including Phillips, would be inclined to exclude this use of "cause" as nonsense. Whether or not we can go along with them in this, perhaps we can agree that, whether the believer's "God made it" is a meaningful causal statement or not, it is certainly not *explanatory*–not if an explanation is supposed to have predictive power or to be less puzzling than its *explanandum*.[37]

I think Phillips would want to stress that the words "God created the heavens and the earth" are not being used to express a *religious* belief unless uttered against the background of a certain conception of life as a whole and of our place in it–a conception from which we draw consequences such as: ordinary things are important in

[37] Worth quoting here is the following exposition of Aquinas by the distinguished Thomist, the late Herbert McCabe:

> Natural causes, operating as trans-formers, provide the answer to the question: *Why did these things come to exist instead of those others*? ... God, on the other hand, would provide the answer to the question *Why is there anything at all rather than nothing*? ... I say that God *would* provide the answer to that question because, since we do not know what God is, we do not have an answer to our question.–"The Logic of Mysticism—I" (in *Religion & Philosophy, ed. Martin Warner* [Royal Institute of Philosophy, Supp. Vol., 31], p. 50).

McCabe then remarks that Aquinas' distinction between the creative act of God (which we do not understand) and natural causality (which we do) is reminiscent of Wittgenstein's distinction in the *Tractatus* between the mystical ["*that* the world is"] and "what can be said" ["*how* the world is"]. There is unfortunately no room in this paper to investigate how McCabe develops that intriguing comparison.

© The author 2008
Journal compilation © The Dominican Council/Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 2008

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2008.01260.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

their own right; treat them with due reverence, not taking them for granted. I would add that speaking of the world as divinely created gives linguistic expression to a common and particularly deep human experience, "wonder at the very existence of the world"[38] –a wonder calling not for explanatory resolution, but for expression–expression in a way of living and assessing life. "Creation theology" is at the service of this way, helping to teach and preserve it by giving it conceptual articulation. The "certain conception of life" it teaches might be summed up in the phrase "world-affirming but not idolatrous."

(I am reminded here of the passage in Book X of the *Confessions* where Augustine asks the Universal Elements whether they might be the God for whom he has been seeking. When they say *no*, he presses them to say something *about* God: *And they cried out in a great voice:"He made us."/ My question was my gazing upon them, and their answer was their beauty.* Now *that*, surely, is not the language of causal explanation![39])

*

> How do we think about the past and the future? If something unwelcome happens: – do we ask "Whose fault is it?" . . . — or do we say "It was God's will"? . . . / In the sense in which asking a question and insisting on an answer is expressive of a different attitude, a different mode of life from not asking it, the same can be said of utterances like "It was God's will" . . . (*CV*, p. 61)

Many of the questions we ask and things we say are expressive of our attitudes, and thus of our state of soul. Asking questions like, "Why did this happen to *me*?" or "Why wasn't I born with more talents and opportunities?" may be symptomatic of what William James called "a sick soul." Spiritual health–what believers might call "the peace of God which passeth all understanding"–requires restraining or limiting the natural and culturally reinforced drive to press such questions. It requires, not the acquisition of more factual knowledge or theoretical understanding, but a profound change in attitude towards the vicissitudes of life and our vulnerabilities.

*

> One kneels & looks up & folds one's hands & speaks, & says one is speaking with God; one says God . . . speaks to me in my heart . . . Learn from this the grammar of the word "God"! (*PPO*, p. 211)

[38] I think the later Wittgenstein would say that, in speaking of "wonder at the existence of *the world*," we may be using the word *wonder* in what he calls "a secondary sense." I talk about this on pp. 144–45 of my *Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations* (SUNY Press, 1999).

[39] Cf. my "Creation, Causality, and Freedom of the Will," in Robert L. Arrington and Mark Addis, eds., *Wittgenstein and Philosophy of Religion* (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 51–65.

© The author 2008
Journal compilation © The Dominican Council/Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 2008

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2008.01260.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

Phillips remarks that to wonder, meaningfully, about whether God exists is to wonder whether there is anything in religious practices such as prayers of praise, thanksgiving, repentance, and petition. *Whether there is a God*? is what Kierkegaard called "an existence question": it calls for a personal response. So, philosophy cannot here answer one's question. For, though "There *is* a God"is in the indicative mood (as Brian Davies stresses in a critique of Phillips[40]), its real function is that of a confession of faith. What is affirmed in such a confession is personal commitment to a "rule of faith" or "truth to live by," rather than an impersonal truth-claim or explanatory hypothesis. Believing in God is not a matter of assenting to a proposition but of "passionately taking hold of a [certain] system of reference" (*CV*, p. 64)–i.e., a religious form of life involving what Brother Lawrence famously called "the practice of the presence of God."

*

> The work done by [the sentence, "It is God's will"] ... could also be done by a command! Including one which you give yourself. And conversely the utterance of a command, such as "Don't be resentful," may be like the affirmation of a truth. (*CV*, p. 61) [41]

Paraphrasing the preceding Wittgenstein quote, one could say that the work done by the sentence "God exists" could also be done by an expression of faith, such as "I believe in God," and conversely, that the expression of faith may be like the affirmation of a truth– "a truth to live by." Just as "God" does not function as the name of one being among others, so the sentence "God exists" does not function as one truth-claim among others. Although its surface grammar makes "God exists" look like just another descriptive, true/false, indicative proposition, the actual work done by this sentence would have to be quite different. The actual work, as Phillips suggests, would be that of expressing one's faith in certain way of living and of assessing life.

"Of course I believe God exists!," the believer might say: "For in him I live, move, and have my being." This is not the kind of thing one says as an account of one's assent to a matter-of-fact proposition in the indicative mood. As Phillips sees it, if wondering whether God exists is to mean anything, it is to wonder whether there is

[40] Davies, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, p. 36.

[41] That remark continues in the revised and augmented edition of *CV* as follows: "Now why am I so anxious to keep apart these [theological] ways of using 'declarative sentences' [from other, more familiar uses]? ... It is simply an attempt to see that every usage gets its due. Perhaps then a reaction against the over-estimation of science.... But of course the words 'see that they get their due' & 'overestimation' express my point of view. I could have said instead: 'I want to help this & this to regain respect': only I don't see it like that."–Alois Pichler, ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), p. 70). Phillips insisted that his point of view, like that of Wittgenstein, was that of "contemplative philosopher," not an apologist.

© The author 2008
Journal compilation © The Dominican Council/Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 2008

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2008.01260.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

anything in religious practices; and if the words, "Yes, there really is a God" are to mean anything, they must be functioning to express something like a conversion experience. Thus: "Praising, thanking, confessing, asking and adoring before God may have meant little to a man. But, then, it means everything to him. He says that God has become a reality in his life. Has this come about by his discovering an object? Hardly. What has happened is that he has found God *in* a praise, a thanksgiving, a confessing, and an asking which were not his beforehand."[42]

Conclusion

As D. Z. Phillips saw it, religion is not *as such* reasonable or unreasonable, veridical or illusory, profound or shallow, clear-headed or confused, sensical or nonsensical. It is a family of human practices, with room to spare for the preceding features–including the positive ones. In other (Heideggerian[43]) words, religion is an "opening" in which a kind of meaning and truth can come to presence, or retreat into the shadows. Like other forms of life, it is to be respected by the philosopher as "a given." Called neither to undermine its foundations nor to provide it with new ones, the philosopher needs to bear in mind that religion "is not based on grounds. . . . It is there–like our life" (*OC*, sec. 559).

Phillips clearly rejects classical theists' use of "the proofs" to justify belief in a divine reality. Does he also reject their ontological claims? Does he–as is commonly thought–end up reducing the reality claims of religion to the expression of emotion? I believe not. Let me supplement what I have already said in support of that belief by quoting the following remark by Anthony Rudd on an earlier version of my paper:

> I take Phillips really insightful (and I take it genuinely Wittgensteinian) point to be that we only understand what ontological claims amount to by locating them in the context of the practices/forms of life/language games in which they are made. So we don't first establish, by dispassionate scientific-style reasoning, that there is a God, and then decide that it is appropriate to feel gratitude for the Creation; the meaning of the belief in God is tied up with our feelings and attitudes toward the world.

[42] *Religion and the Hermeneutics of Contemplation,* p. 98.

[43] "Religion, on a Heideggerian account, can be described as a way being-in-the-world. . . . On this conception, 'the gods' or 'holy godly ones' comprise an integral element of the world . . . Being religious is a matter of understanding things in advance as related to the 'gods', so that they can show up as sacred, as 'creation', etc." – Benjamin D. Crowe, "Heidegger's Gods," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, 15:2 (2007), p. 241. In a footnote, Crowe points out "a certain resemble to contemporary Wittgensteinian accounts of religion, such as D. Z. Phillips."

© The author 2008
Journal compilation © The Dominican Council/Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 2008

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2008.01260.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

Rudd thinks that Phillips sometimes mixes up that insight with more dubious, emotivist ideas.[44] Certainly many of his critics seem to have found it easy to read his not-always-lucid prose as denying the centrality of ontological claims to religion. That was in spite of his consistent and frequently reiterated view that believing in God is believing in a logically distinct *kind* of reality, one, the idea of which begins–but does not end–with certain common reactions or responses to the physical, social, and ethical realities of human life. It is certainly true that he resists theological-philosophical attempts to construe "God" as the name of a transcendent Somebody or Something (a noumenal agent cause) behind the phenomena of our life. Although one can certainly picture another's pain on the model of "a beetle in a box" (*PI*, sec. 293), the word "pain" doesn't function in one's language like "beetle," i.e., as the name of a thing: for instance, "Is she *really* in pain?" can't be understood on the model of "Is there *really* a beetle in the box?" Similarly, although one can certainly picture "God is with us" on the model of "somebody is with us," the word "God" doesn't actually function in religious people's language much like the name of a somebody: for instance, "Was God really there with us as we talked?" can't be understood on the model of "Was Charlie really there with us as we talked?" (Paraphrasing *PI*, sec. 304.) Phillips' conclusion is the same about divine reality as was Wittgenstein's about the reality of a sensation: it not a *something*, but not a *nothing* either.

The philosophy of theology practiced by Phillips and other "Wittgensteinians" certainly strikes many readers as unorthodox and reductive. For other readers, however (myself included), it reveals possibilities of sense in the language of classical theism–reveals life in what, for us was a dead, though still revered form of words. While not doubting that his philosophy of religion is unorthodox by most standards (it wouldn't have received the *Imprimatur*!), I do want to reject the common objection that it is really a form of secular humanism hidden under religious verbiage. For it brings out the possibility of a vision of life and a way of assessing it radically different from that of any such humanism.

William Brenner
Dept of Philosophy & Religious Studies,
Old Dominion University,
Norfolk,
VA 23529, USA
Email: WBrenner@odu.edu.

[44] Anthony Rudd, "Warming Up the Cool Place: Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein and D. Z. Phillips" (*Faith and Philosophy* 22:2 [2005], pp. 127–143).

© The author 2008
Journal compilation © The Dominican Council/Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 2008

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.2008.01260.x Published online by Cambridge University Press