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## Can Anything be Beyond Human Understanding?

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### I

The answer to the question of my title, if anything could reasonably count as an answer, depends in large part on how we take 'can' and 'beyond understanding'. I will come to this. But my discussion also takes place against the background of D.Z. Phillips's remarks about 'the vicissitudes of human life being beyond human understanding' and about the 'limits of human existence'. All, in turn, take place against the background of thinking about religions in a non-rationalistic Wittgensteinian manner. I will argue that there are senses in which Phillips is right in his claim that there are vicissitudes in human life which are beyond human understanding, but that these senses are of little philosophical interest. In the senses that might deliver philosophical gold, the claim is at best false.

Phillips is a charter member of the club which I have called Wittgensteinian fideists.<sup>1</sup> I am still inclined to believe that my criticisms of Wittgensteinian fideism were essentially correct. That notwithstanding, I have considerable sympathy with what Phillips says about theodicies and towards what he takes to be the key division in the philosophy of religion: a division not between believers and unbelievers, but between rationalistic believers and unbelievers, on the one hand, and non-rationalistic believers and unbelievers on the other. The rationalists think it important to formulate theodicies or anti-theodicies, to examine what 'miracles' can show, and to examine the proofs for the existence of God with an eye to determining whether any of them could after all be sound. By contrast, a non-rationalist approach takes such rationalistic philosophical questions as questions which tend to

distract us from serious thinking about religion. Here I am in agreement with Phillips. But for reasons I will make clear in this essay, I do not wish to characterise the non-rationalists (whether believers or not) as people 'who recognise that the limits of human existence are beyond human understanding' (I, 153).<sup>2</sup>

It should be noted, however, that the *Weltgeist* has gone against both of us. I had hoped twenty years ago that the discussion of religion – including the deliberations between belief and unbelief – would take a broadly Wittgensteinian/Kierkegaardian/Feuerbachian/Barthian turn. Instead, such non-rationalism was short-lived, going along with the rise and fall of Oxford linguistic philosophy. The dominant trend is now towards the pre-Wittgensteinian and pre-Kierkegaardian issues and questions: towards a kind of religiosity which discusses the traditional metaphysical questions of natural theology making use of analytical philosophy and modal logic, but still proceeding as if only Geach, Dummett and Kripke – but not Wittgenstein, Quine, Putnam, Davidson and Rorty – ever existed. We get foundationalist arguments for or against realism rather than a sense that the dispute between realists and anti-realists is a pseudo-issue better dissolved than resolved. Rather than leaving such metaphysical issues to benign neglect, most analytical philosophers of religion rush in to take either a staunch metaphysical realist stance, as in the case of William Alston, or, with Dummett, they adopt a firm anti-realist stance. Insisting on 'ontological seriousness', they take such metaphysical theses at face value and try to resolve them. Davidson, Putnam and Rorty have, by contrast, shown us the way to go here; and more generally, they have set aside metaphysical issues as unanswerable without falling into positivist dogma. With Putnam there is from time to time a nostalgic looking back, but there is also a firm understanding that metaphysics is a house of cards which neither requires nor stands in need of answers. But contemporary analytic philosophy of religion, seemingly unaware of these developments, is deep in the metaphysical mud. Phillips sets his face against this as firmly as I do. This is all to the good. But he unwittingly tangles himself in some metaphysical issues which stand in the way of a perspicuous understanding of our forms of life, and with this, of our lives.

II

Phillips has written voluminously on what I should characterise as a Wittgensteinian approach to the philosophy of religion. In years past I have come to grips with roughly the first half of Phillips's corpus on this broad topic. As I remarked initially, I have not changed my views in any essential respects about what I called Wittgensteinian fideism. But in the last decade my disinterest in the philosophy of religion has become so great that I have read very little of the literature, and except for the following two essays I have not studied Phillips's later work at all. Here I shall concentrate on two recent essays germane to my topic: his 'On Not Understanding God' and 'From Coffee to Carmelites'. I shall argue that in these essays Phillips surely wants to get out of the fly bottle, but that he has not succeeded and that this failure carries a salutary lesson.

III

I now turn to his arguments and to his narrative. Phillips claims that in philosophy, and in our Enlightenment culture generally, there is a reluctance – rooted, he believes, in prejudice, or at least in confusion – to admit 'that there is anything which passes beyond human understanding' (II, 131).<sup>3</sup> There are many things, of course, that we do not understand – ignorance and self-deception are widespread. Even when we work at them in a careful and disciplined way – as scientists, logicians or philosophers – there are things we fail to understand. There is wide cultural agreement about this.

However, this is still something which just happens to be the case. It does not at all mean, or even suggest, that what we fail to understand 'is something which is beyond understanding'. What we fail to understand remains in principle, the orthodox claim goes, within the reach of human understanding. There is nothing that is *necessarily* beyond human understanding. 'That something could be necessarily beyond human understanding seems to be an intolerable thought, the denial of a philosophical vocation.' (I, 153) Phillips takes the belief that this is so to be a pervasive philosophical prejudice flying in the face 'of what is platonically obvious: that there is much that passes beyond human

understanding' (II, 131). He believes that a philosopher might, and a fully perceptive philosopher *will*, come to understand that there is something – *necessarily* – beyond human understanding. And a crucial bit of this is 'that the limits of human existence are beyond human understanding' (II, 131). It is surely evident that if accepted this would give consolation both to the Kierkegaardian knight of faith and to the Camusian-Sartrean existentialist atheist. But this is not a fine brash philosophical thesis to be affirmed or denied, but a philosophical muddle which rests on a failure to command a clear view of our language. It is a claim which should be up for dissolution rather than resolution.

Let me turn now to an explanation of why I say this. What is it to say that when 'one is reacting to the vicissitudes of human life . . . one is reacting to something which is beyond human understanding' (I, 160)? And what does it mean to say, as it is standardly said by religious people, that 'the ways of God are beyond human understanding' (I, 163)? Put otherwise, the ways of God are said to be inscrutable. If, as I think, it is a right move in philosophy to begin thinking about God by exploring 'the grammar of talk about the ways of God, given in our language, instead of assuming *ab initio* standards by which such talk *must* be assessed', then we will start our exploration by simply acknowledging that religious people say that God is inscrutable and that His ways are beyond human understanding. That is just how we play, if we play such language-games at all, the language-game of Christian, Jewish and Islamic God-talk.

So why does Phillips say 'that there is something necessarily beyond human understanding' (I, 168)? According to Phillips, what is crucial here is to recognise that we are up against, not *limitations* to human understanding which might be overcome, but the very *limits* of human understanding. Whether your reaction to a recognition of the limits, rather than the limitations, of human understanding is religious or non-religious, if it is not confused it will be a recognition that *there is nothing to be understood*, nothing to be put right by understanding or action (I, 168). Samuel Beckett says it, with a succinct translation into the concrete, when he has his character Hamm say, 'You're on earth: there's no cure for that' (I, 168; S. Beckett, *Endgame*, Faber & Faber, 1976, p. 37).

What sorts of things does Phillips say are necessarily beyond human understanding and can take no relevant explanation, for there is nothing to understand? He tells us that there are certain

facts of human existence which can typically be given mundane causal explanations, but where our *reactions* to them show us, if we reflect, that even when perfectly correct these explanations are plainly not to the point. They are, that is, not what is to the point when we react to these facts of human existence: facts of what Phillips obscurely calls the limits of human existence. Here we are talking about the vicissitudes of human life. As I noted, in some ways they are explainable, or at least in principle could be, but in an important respect they are still necessarily beyond human understanding. (I would think, since in the relevant respect they are not a matter of understanding or knowledge at all, they would be beyond superhuman understanding, if such there be, as well. They would be beyond God's understanding as well as ours, and since there is nothing to be known, that would be no limitation on God's omniscience or omnipotence). The characteristic facts in question are the 'blind forces of nature, the unpredictable visitations of disease and death, the transitoriness of fame, treason by friends and kin . . . [and] the limitations of time and place' (I, 161).

Suppose a writer, caring much about her work and struggling against odds to achieve something of merit and insight, is, unknown to herself, about to receive the Nobel prize for literature. But the day before the announcement was to come to her, she suddenly and unexpectedly has a heart attack and dies without ever knowing that she has received the award. It is natural in such circumstances to lament 'Why did it have to happen to her just then, on just that day?' As Stephen Toulmin has noted with his conception of a limiting question, this 'Why?' is not a request for an explanation but a verbal expression of a cry of anguish.<sup>4</sup> We characteristically ask it when we have good causal explanations of why it happened. We are not looking for more information; indeed, unless we are metaphysically befuddled, we are not asking for any bit of knowledge or any explanation at all. We recognise, causally explainable though it is, that we are just up against one of those brute contingencies that happen for no rhyme or reason. There is no justifying it or blaming anyone for its happening; we are here outside the domain of what is justifiable and what is not. (If it cannot be justified, it makes no sense to say it is unjustified either. Such normative terms have no hold or application here.) Why it happened, *looking at it normatively*, is beyond understanding. And it is a plain example of things that happen again

and again and are to be contrasted with a child's death from starvation – one of the thirty-five thousand that so die everyday – or people dying of AIDS brought about by a transfusion of tainted blood. These latter things could, with care and commitment, be prevented. They are things for which certain people are responsible, and they are unjustifiable in that wrongs are done to people that can and should be prevented. But the writer dying just then, dismaying as it is, is nothing that is up before the bar of moral or otherwise normative assessment, criticism or deliberation; it is not the sort of thing that with foresight and resolute action could have been prevented or ameliorated. Questions of neither justification nor exculpation are in order; there is nothing normatively relevant to be known.

While it is at least plausible to believe that in the order of causes a principle of sufficient reason is at work, it is altogether implausible to believe that such a principle is at work in the domain of good and bad such that there is a justifying or excusing reason for every bad or good thing that happens. Some bad and some good things happen to us for no reason, and where they are horrendous enough we may cry out against them. What is puzzling is not that these things happen but that Phillips makes such a hue and cry about them. If we like we can talk about the 'limits of human existence', 'the limits of understanding', of something being necessarily beyond knowledge or understanding. But this is just a grandiloquent way of saying what could be expressed more prosaically and less misleadingly by saying that these matters are important to us, and that they are not matters of knowing or failing to know, of understanding or failing to understand, of reason or lack of reason, but things to which the notions of knowing and understanding, for God or man, are not applicable.

#### IV

To sum up: The vicissitudes of human life are often understood well enough, in the sense that we know their causes. We also know that they happen for no rhyme or reason; and because of this the notion of justifying them, or failing to justify them, makes no sense. But there is no need to make a mystery out of that. There is no intolerable thought here, making mish-mash out of the 'life of reason', that something is, or even could be, necess-

arily beyond human understanding in that sense. It is simply the case that in the domain of the normative the principle of sufficient reason does not apply. Horrible things happen for no reason, with no one to blame, with no injustice being done.

Is there, however, perhaps some more significant sense in which something could be said to be *necessarily* beyond human understanding? We – meaning people who are likely to read this essay and people from a similar social stratum who share, in general way, a similar way of life – find certain other cultures utterly alien to us such that we cannot, or so we believe, understand them. These other people live in ‘an alien society’ which we cannot understand from within the mode of understanding we possess. There is sometimes, to circumscribe the claim further, a radical *incommensurability* between two societies (II, 133). Phillips accepts, plausibly enough it seems to me, the Wittgensteinian point that ‘language gets its sense from the way it enters human life’ (II, 132). But when people have radically different lives there will ‘be as many differences in their languages as there are in their lives’ (II, 132). As a result, they do not just *fail* to understand each other; they *cannot* understand one another.

This is H.O. Mounce’s view, which Phillips is criticising in part, but also partially endorsing – though not very plainly. It appears, that is, that Phillips is endorsing the radical incommensurability just characterised. Sometimes there are societies, say A and B, in which there are some things in A which the people in B cannot understand: they necessarily pass beyond understanding for them. This, Phillips seems to agree, can and does sometimes happen.

But such an incommensurability claim misses the quite different, though mutually supporting, points made against it by Donald Davidson, Isaac Levi and Charles Taylor.<sup>5</sup> If in saying that the beliefs, conceptions and concepts of society A are incommensurable with those of society B, we are saying that there are beliefs, conceptions and concepts expressible in the language of B which are untranslatable into the language of A, then we have said something which is at best false. Where we treat meaning holophrastically and go moderately holistic, as do Quine and Davidson, there is no indeterminacy of translation. There are, as a matter of fact, no languages which are mutually untranslatable.<sup>6</sup> This is true even of the radically different languages of radically different cultures. (This was even stressed, paradoxically, by the articulators of what came to be called ‘the Whorf-Sapir hypothesis’.) Moreover, given

the resources for mutual comprehensibility between radically different languages of radically different cultures, there are no good reasons, if we go holophrastically, to think that there are even terms in one language that cannot be understood in the terms of the other language. Where the one culture is very alien to the other, and where it is very difficult to understand a concept in the language of the one culture by utilising the resources of the other, there is a temptation to speak of incommensurability. But we cannot reasonably ask for term-by-term translation. We need to go holophrastic, and moderately holistic, and still we will make mistake after mistake, and perhaps never *in fact* get the translation of the alien language just right. Marcel Proust, for example, has been translated into English a number of times.

A good example of what I am contending is that of E.E. Evans-Pritchard's and Peter Winch's treatment of the Azande concept of witchcraft, a concept which certainly does not, to put it minimally, match our own.<sup>7</sup> But Winch, in correcting Evans-Pritchard's errors and at the same time building on him, gave us an understanding of the Azande concept. Moreover, if we *necessarily* could have no understanding of the concept, such that in principle no attempt to characterise or elucidate it in our language or any other language could succeed, then for reasons Davidson has forcefully argued we could never know whether or not that was so.<sup>8</sup> We would understand nothing at all here. But that is very different from saying there is some belief, concept, conception, term, sentence or truth which passes beyond the understanding. We would at least have to know enough about it to understand what it was that passes beyond our understanding. Let us fabricate some language and suppose there is in that language a term 'uzad'. Suppose I master the language but still do not understand 'uzad'. All my efforts to get a grip on it fail. But to say that it is logically impossible for me, starting from my native tongue, to translate or understand it, as distinct from saying that so far all attempts at translation have failed, makes no sense. At least to know that 'uzad' is part of the language in question, I must understand it as a word, a phrase or perhaps a sentence in that language. I see that it fits or fails to fit with other grammatical sentences in the language. I catch something of its syntax. If I do not understand anything like that, then I am in no position to say that there is a term, concept, conception or belief in the language of that culture that I cannot – necessarily – understand. The thesis that there are



concepts of an alien culture that necessarily pass the understanding of the people of another culture is an incoherent conception, probably a product of the Kantian scheme/content dogma criticised so effectively by Davidson.

We can escape these difficulties by dropping talk of 'necessarily' or 'necessity'. Doing so leaves us with the banality that it is often difficult in certain particular respects to understand others both within our own culture and, even more obviously, in different cultures.<sup>9</sup> Sometimes they have notions we do not understand very well at all, notions that thoroughly baffle us. Moreover, it is not only the people in New Guinea that I have a hard time understanding. The skinhead with the shaved head with a red stripe painted across it, his arms and chest almost completely tattooed, with long earrings and a strange gait, is nearly as strange to me. I observe him as he gets on the same bus as I do and then the same metro, and I wonder what he is thinking, what ambitions, hopes and fears he has, what sense of himself he has and why it is that he so decks himself out. I feel at a considerable distance from such a person: his life seems, and no doubt is, alien to me; and mine to him, no doubt. But there are also all the familiar ways in which I could learn about the life of such a person. There is no logical or otherwise conceptual barrier of incommensurability here, or, as far as we can discover, anywhere else either, which justifies, or even gives sense to, the belief that there are, for a person in a given culture, other people in the same or in another culture, with conceptions so alien to this person that they are necessarily incommensurable, that is, untranslatable, such that this person can have no understanding of what they mean when the others speak: each being immersed in a different conceptual scheme such that both are conceptually imprisoned in their own perspective with no possible understanding of the other.

Suppose we say (*pace* Davidson) that incommensurability should not come to untranslatability but either to non-comparability or to the lack of shared standards of rationality, making common acceptance and assessment impossible. The response to this should be that once untranslatability is abandoned, there is no reason to believe that comparability is impossible or that we have so little common toehold in rationality that some sharing in understanding and common acceptance of what is rational and what is not is even in principle impossible. Of course, people, over time and place, will have different standards of rationality.<sup>10</sup> But to say, as

Phillips does, that there is no common rationality which people can appeal to, is to say more than that standards of rationality differ. To establish this claim, we would need to know not only that standards differ, but also that they have no central features in common. The platitudinous truth is that in some respects they differ and in some respects they are the same. With that sameness, even if it is rather thin, we have some common starting-point from which we could reason and deliberate about our differences, using something like what John Rawls and Norman Daniels have called the method of reflective equilibrium.<sup>11</sup> To think, as did Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, that there is something like a primitive mentality that leads primitive people to think utterly differently than we do, is at best a groundless claim. Our wiring is very similar and with our large brains (something cutting across cultures) we can, if other things do not go too badly, think. Moreover, we all have beliefs, desires, intentions and plans. We wish to realise our desires, to see whether our beliefs and desires fit, or fail to fit, reasonably well, and the like. And if they hang together reasonably well, we will seek a better fit. (If this is folk psychology, make the most of it.) With these capacities and resources we can, and do, deliberate about what it is reasonable to think and do. It is not plausible, perhaps not even intelligible, to think that we will run up against points where what we take to be reasonable to believe or think is *so different* from what people in other cultures take to be reasonable, that it is *necessarily* the case that any cross-cultural deliberations and comparisons will be fruitless, or will break down, revealing a radical incommensurability of perspective. It is more plausible to believe that than to believe in incommensurability as untranslatability. And if there are common resources of rationality, there will also be common resources for comparability. To put the point more modestly, if such deliberation and such comparisons are *necessarily* impossible across cultures, such that the disputants even in theory cannot understand one another or deliberate together, then (a) give some evidence for that, and more fundamentally, (b) show how it is that we can know, or even coherently believe, that this is so. There is the empirical fact that understanding, fruitful argument, agreement, and so on, across cultures, and even within cultures, is difficult. But we must not, if we wish to remain relatively clear-headed and reasonable, slip from that fact to the claim that they and we are conceptually imprisoned in utterly incommensurable

frameworks. There is no good reason to believe that mutual incomprehension and bewilderment are so intractable and so deep.

V

So the fact that there are cultures alien to each other, and that even within a single culture there are very different people with very different perspectives (say a Hamann and a d'Holbach, a de Maistre and a Condorcet), gives us no toehold for the belief in a radical incommensurability whereby some people necessarily pass beyond the understanding of some other people. But Phillips also considers, critically following Mounce, whether 'there are things which pass beyond the understanding of *all* human beings: things which human beings can never come to understand' (II, 136; my italics). The kinds of cases Mounce presents, and Phillips considers, are our trying to understand the condition of a dog, what it is like to be a bat, or whether fish can feel pain. Mounce works with these examples in order to 'illustrate the difference between that which we fail to understand and that which passes beyond human understanding' (II, 131). Phillips argues, cogently I believe, that the bat, the dog or the fish cases do not show us that 'there are things which pass beyond the understanding of all human beings; things which human beings can never come to understand' (II, 136-41).

There are also, it is claimed, things that one class of human beings can never understand about another class. The rich, Mounce has it, can never know what it is like to be poor, to live on the dole for example. But (*pace* Mounce) the rich can see, indeed observe rather systematically (travel with their eyes open, as de Beauvoir and Sartre did); they can read social scientists' accounts of poverty, extend their understanding by the reading of imaginative literature, and the like. Like George Orwell they can even live and work with the poor, taking jobs the poor take, living with the poor as the poor live. But Mounce would say 'that no matter how much understanding of the poor the rich have, they do not know *exactly* what it is like to be poor' (II, 141-2). Even Orwell could not know what it is like to be poor, even after living and working with them and writing *Down and Out in Paris and London*, for he was not poor and did not have the same inescapable vulnerability as the poor. On Mounce's account, to really

know what it is to be poor comes to saying that you must be poor. Since the rich do not have to live with poverty, they do not know, and cannot – really – know, what it is like to be poor. But this is to turn something by means of an implicit, persuasive definition into a tautology that on normal readings or understandings it is not. It is very likely true that most of the time the poor know more about poverty than the non-poor. But the non-poor can know a great deal about poverty; and in some cases someone like Orwell, who acutely observed and reflected on what he saw, might very well come to know more about poverty and being poor than do many of the poor. At least we cannot rule this out by conceptual fiat. Similar things can, and should, be said about paranoia and schizophrenia. Harry Stack Sullivan probably knew more about what it is like to be schizophrenic than most, perhaps all, schizophrenics. We cannot justifiably identify ‘understanding a way of life’ with ‘living a way of life’. These examples do not show that there are some things for some human beings which necessarily pass beyond their understanding.

The dog, bat and fish cases may seem to show that there are some things which pass beyond the understanding of all human beings. But I think Phillips shows that those familiar claims are mistaken. I do not know whether fish feel pain or not; but by studying carefully their nervous system and the like, and watching carefully their behaviour, I, and others, could come to a reasonable understanding of what is likely the case here. Similar things obtain for understanding what it is like to be a bat or a dog. A dog to which you are very close and know very well might, when you look at him reflectively, come to seem enigmatic to you. You wonder what is going on in his head, how he perceives the world. And this is even more so with bats, with whom most of us do not live in very close contact. Phillips shows how we could come to understand such animals reasonably well. There is not some conceptual gulf between what they are and how they react such that we could not understand them at all. What Mounce, and in this case Thomas Nagel as well, show is that we can never know from the inside, as it were, what it is like to be a dog or a bat, but this is only, again by the use of an implicit persuasive definition, to identify knowing what it is like to be a bat or a dog with being a bat or a dog. But this works no better for these cases than for the others. Dog trainers and some dog lovers know a great deal about dogs without being dogs, and bat specialists can

know a great deal about bats without being bats. In general, to understand or know *x* is not the same thing as being *x* or even, in some tendentious sense, experiencing *x*.<sup>12</sup> We have no plausible or even firmly coherent model for saying that there are some things – a bat, a dog, a god, God, a Martian, a computer, or what not – that human beings *necessarily* cannot know so that these things are beyond human understanding. And this is not hubris, but a reasonable grasp of how our language-games are played.

## VI

Mystical experience, and mystical awareness of the inscrutable, God in particular, is sometimes used as an example of what few special people who have had that experience can know, and that others cannot understand – necessarily cannot understand. Those of us who have not had mystical experiences cannot understand what the mystic can. It is sometimes claimed that this religious case will yield a genuine example of understanding something that for most people passes beyond the understanding.

There are, of course, problems about the very intelligibility of talk of mystical experience, for the mystic as well as non-mystic. But that aside, there is, at least on the face of it, much that can be learned about mystical experience from those who have not had it but have carefully studied and reflected on it. William James, W.T. Stace and Ninian Smart have, without having had mystical experience, written about it with care, and sometimes insight; and some people have, to some extent at least, understood them.<sup>13</sup> To say that what the writers and readers understand is not really to understand mystical experience, for to understand the experience it is necessary to have it, is to make the unjustified claim of identifying understanding *x* with having *x*. We have already seen that there is no justification for that claim. Thus it cannot be correct to say that the mystical experiences, spiritual exercises and more generally contemplative practices must pass beyond our understanding if we have not had mystical experience. Mystics were not, of course, born mystics. They came, typically after rigorous self-discipline, to experience something which at one time was beyond their understanding. Phillips claims that what they came to experience came about as the result of a transformation, not an extension, of their prior understanding. The claim is that only

by such a transformation of the understanding can such experiences be understood (II, 143).

Suppose it is claimed that reading these accounts of mystical experience, including the writings of someone like St John of the Cross, will not convey real understanding until the reader has had the experience itself. Those readers who have not had mystical experience, the argument goes, are to St John's reports like the blind are to the sighted. To this we should respond that the analogy is apt. The blind can understand what sight is; they just cannot see. The mystical experience case seems to be fully analogous. Moreover, even if the understanding requires a transformation of experience, the transformation is rooted in something we already have and is familiar to us, and we could not have such a transformation, with the changed perspective on life it brings, without it. It is a necessary background condition for the transformation. Indeed, extension and transformation slide into one another. In those ways the stress on a sharp contrast between extension and transformation is in error.

St John of the Cross thought that what he was saying would only be fully understood by those specially prepared to receive it. But this 'being specially prepared' was to have received a certain spiritual training; and this is, as Phillips remarks, 'a matter of building on, extending, ordinary religious practices' (II, 146). There is a transformation which takes place in mystical experience, but it is a transformation which is essentially connected with the religious practices and conceptions which preceded it. Mystical experience does not come about as a result of some unmediated initiation. The belief that it does, Phillips writes, is itself 'a magical view of mysticism' (II, 146). So mystical experience is not inherently inexpressible, the mystic's claims are not self-authenticating, and they are not something that can be understood only by someone who has them. Again we have nothing that goes beyond understanding.

## VII

It has not been shown that it is the case, or even can be the case, that the experiences or understanding some people have *necessarily* pass beyond the understanding of all human beings. Contingently, of course, there are many things that some people know

and others do not and cannot know. Children, to say nothing of infants, do not know many things that normal adults do. Primitive peoples know some things that we do not know and we know some things they do not. In both cases some things *contingently* pass beyond the understanding of some people. These things are the merest truisms, but true for all that. They are only worth reminding ourselves of because of certain philosophical confusions.<sup>14</sup>

It is only slightly less truistic to say that if there are gods, or if God or intelligent Martians exist, these beings (if that is what God is) will know things that no human being as a matter of fact can know. But this is like saying that human beings cannot hear certain sounds that dogs can, as when we blow a whistle that we do not hear ourselves but dogs do. There is no conceptual, or logical, ban on our hearing these sounds; it is just the case that, as a matter of fact, we cannot hear them. But what the Martians or gods, if such there be, and what God, if He is even possible, can know that we cannot is just like that. This, however, is not the kind of 'failing to understand' in which Phillips is interested. It is not the model he wants for trying to understand what 'passing beyond one's understanding' amounts to. Moreover, philosophers, like everyone else, have not been at all reluctant to admit that things can and sometimes do pass beyond our understanding in these – philosophically speaking – trivial ways. However, where we stick with 'in principle' and 'of necessity' in trying to model the understanding of something passing beyond human understanding, we run into trouble teasing out a coherent sense for these claims. If a Martian can understand it, why is it logically impossible for us? If an adult can understand it, why is it logically impossible for a child? If God understands it, why is it logically impossible for us? There seems to be no answer to these questions. At the very least Phillips has suggested none.

Suppose we drop the qualification 'human' and say instead, including even God in our scope, that 'there may be something beyond understanding; not something accidentally or temporarily beyond it, but something necessarily beyond understanding'. It is a tautology to say that if something is not a matter of knowledge or understanding, so that there is nothing to understand or fail to understand, then it cannot be understood. But it is extravagant rhetoric to say that we have here something which passes beyond understanding. This is more like bad poetry than philosophical description and analysis. To say that we understand something

which it makes no sense to understand is a contradiction; to say that we should not try to understand what in principle is not a matter of understanding is a truism – though it is perfectly true that as a *second-order* matter we can come to understand that some things are not matters of understanding or knowledge at all. But as we have seen, we get into trouble when, as Phillips does, we add ‘human’ to qualify ‘understanding’. If understanding is logically impossible, then it is logically impossible, period. Bringing God in will not make the slightest difference. What we have seen is that in a trivial, philosophically uninteresting sense, Mounce is right that it is ‘platitudinously obvious that there is much that passes beyond human understanding’, but that in the philosophically interesting ways of construing that claim it is at best thoroughly problematic.

We talk in an inflated and obscurantist way when we talk of the limits of human existence or the limits of understanding. In both instances, if it means anything, it means, as Phillips shows, that in certain situations there is nothing to understand: not for us, for Martians, for computers or for God. So if there is nothing to understand then there is no object of, or proper occasion for, wonder or perplexity over the fact that there is something which passes beyond understanding that we could not set right by understanding. That is about as evident as anything can be. Consider an example. People age and sometimes their powers – physical, intellectual and on occasion even moral – fail. There are reasonable causal explanations of why this happens. But there is no mystery here, nothing to wonder or be perplexed about, or to reflect on with an eye to making sense of it. It is just a brute fact of the world, one of the contingencies of the world which matters to us. It does not pass beyond understanding in the sense that we do not know *why* it happens; neither does it pass beyond understanding in the sense that God or a Martian could see the justification for it while we cannot. There is no justification for it: not because it is unjustified, but because it could be neither justified nor unjustified. Such normative notions have no hold here. (Not seeing this is, in part, what is the matter with theodicies.) In that sense they are not a matter of knowledge. Suppose a great poet grows senile and comes to write drivel. Faced with this we may say ‘Oh, why did it have to happen to him? Why? Why?!’ This is our old friend the limiting question again, expressing our lament and anguish and our sense of regret that the world is



such. The 'Why?' does not ask for an explanation, for more knowledge, for a rationale, excuse or justification to be supplied, or anything like that. It gives vent to our feelings. It is an expressive use of language. To say that it points to something which passes beyond understanding is misleading at best, for it suggests that something like understanding is at issue, when what is at issue are human reactions and deliberations in the light of these brute facts on what are the more appropriate reactions in such circumstances, if this can ever be reasoned out or reasoned *and* felt out. (That we can in some instances deliberate on what are the most appropriate feelings does not mean that feelings themselves are a form of cognition or a form of knowledge or understanding.)

## VIII

What has all this to do with Divine Inscrutability? Phillips, wanting to avoid theodicies, wants as a 'philosopher . . . to understand what is meant by saying that God's ways are beyond human understanding'. What he has perhaps succeeded in showing us, or at least given us some understanding of, is what can sensibly be meant by 'God's ways are beyond understanding *sans phrase*'. But then he has in effect also shown us that there is nothing to be understood except that the whole matter should be set aside. Moreover, even if we do somehow get, against what I have argued, some appropriate understanding of what it is for God's ways to be beyond human understanding, this does not mean, as Phillips is quick to point out, that we understand God (I, 168-9). But we then fall into still other difficulties. The hope was that by coming to some understanding of 'the place that the belief that God's ways are beyond understanding has in the lives of believers', we could gain a foothold on what it is to believe in God and what it would be to encounter God (I, 169; II, 149). But if this does not help us to understand God, then, we should ask, what does? It seems that the very concept of God, in developed forms of Judaeo-Christianity and Islam, is incoherent. The idea of God as an 'infinite individual transcendent to the universe' has at least the appearance of a contradiction; and the definite descriptions used to teach the meaning of 'God', where these descriptions are supposed to specify a non-anthropomorphic reality, all seem so

problematic as to yield no tolerably firm sense of what we are talking about. We seem to have no more than human reactions to a something, we understand not what. Divine Inscrutability is so inscrutable that we do not even have a sense of what it is to scrutinise here.<sup>15</sup> If God is utterly beyond human understanding, then there is nothing to be said, nothing to be thought, nothing to be perplexed about, nothing to wonder at. Accounts of encounters with God, of coming to know and love God, of living or standing in the presence of God, of sensing or feeling the grace of God, are what Axel Hägerström called 'empty phrases' without sense.<sup>16</sup>

Phillips claims that the mystics do not give reports, flawed or otherwise, 'or descriptions which fall short of the mark, but expressions of their encounter with God' (II, 149). He also says that this encounter with God, if genuine, must be an experience which passes beyond all human understanding (II, 149). Given the other things he says, it must be an experience which necessarily, and not just contingently, passes beyond human understanding. But we have seen that this is an incoherent notion, and this being so, that the very notion of an encounter with God, at least on this reading, must also be incoherent.

Phillips might respond, as he does to Mounce, that like most philosophers I place too much weight on *understanding*. I worry about the coherence or truth of the belief that, where God is concerned, we need to understand that it is something which passes beyond our understanding, 'at least while we are on earth'; and, over-intellectualising things, I try to see if any coherent sense can be made of that. Phillips remarks that 'religious reactions . . . are very different. When they speak of that which passes beyond understanding, they invite us to consider the possibility of reacting to human life in a way other than by understanding' (II, 149). One reaction that Phillips takes to be religious, and appropriately so, is that of wonder. But it is to wonder in such a way that we can think of the grace of God. It is not the speculative wonder of the Greek philosophers. Phillips thinks that this is a natural way for wonder to go for the person of faith. But we – including in the 'we' the person of faith – need some understanding of 'God' to see how the 'gifts of nature can be seen as gifts of grace', God's grace (II, 150). But then we cannot just be reacting to human life in a way other than by understanding. The very possibility of so reacting requires some understanding, and we cannot have that if God is necessarily beyond human understanding.

Phillips might respond that the language of the mystic, like religious language more generally, is in our midst and 'language gets its sense from the way it enters human life'; so that 'the language of walking with God, meeting God, gets its sense, if it does anywhere, from the way this language entered the life of St John of the Cross' (II, 151). That language, which is one paradigmatic strand of religious language, involves talk of God being beyond human understanding as well as talk of the importance in the religious life of 'dying to the understanding'. Phillips would no doubt claim that in saying that such talk is incoherent, that it does not make sense, I must be importing standards of rationality or intelligibility from outside the religious language-games actually played; and it is unclear where these standards could come from, what authority they could have, why we should appeal to them, or why the religious person, or anyone else, should pay any heed at all. They seem, Phillips could say, like news from nowhere, arbitrary impositions from out of the blue.

I agree with Phillips that language gets its sense from the way it enters human life. This is a lesson we have rightly taken from Wittgenstein. But language must be taken more holistically than Phillips takes it. We must not take one language-game or linguistic practice, or even a localised cluster of them, standing by themselves. It is not enough to say, 'This language-game is played'. We need to look at the language more broadly and try to gain a perspicuous representation of how various language-games in various domains of our talk and thought, of our discoursing with each other, go, or fail to go, together. Thus we might come to recognise that religious talk ('God-talk' as I call it, as distinct from other religious talk, such as the Buddhist might engage in) could have the grammar – the logic, in Phillips's extended sense of 'logic' – that he says it has and still be incoherent because of the way it stands with other parts of our talk. That something like this is the case is what I think. But I can think that, while still taking it that language gets its sense from the way it enters human life, because I look at language more holistically than does Phillips – thinking that a moderate holism, such as we find in Donald Davidson and Richard Rorty, squares better with how our language and thinking works than any balkanised or molecular view of language.

I think, and indeed hope, that God-talk, and religious discourse more generally, is, or at least should be, dying out in the West,

or more generally in a world that has felt the force of a Weberian disenchantment of the world. This sense that religious convictions are no longer a live option is something which people who think of themselves as either modernists or post-modernists very often tend to have. It may even be partly definitive of being such a person. For Alasdair MacIntyre, and presumably for Phillips as well, this is a distressing, or at least a saddening, matter. For me, firmly modernist as I am, it is a hopeful sign. As Richard Rorty puts it, perhaps we can at last get the Enlightenment without the Enlightenment's *rationalism*. Among the intelligentsia such attitudes of disenchantment are widespread; and these attitudes, given a moderate amount of security and wealth, can reasonably be expected to trickle slowly down to the rest of society. The view from North America is that the view has not trickled down extensively to the population more generally. There has, however, been a lot of such trickling down in the securer, more prosperous and better educated Scandinavian societies.

This Weberian and Habermasian sense of how modernity can be expected to evolve under conditions of security and abundance could go with a view like Phillips's that language gets its sense from the way it enters human life. Simon Blackburn has stated, though rather as an aside, what many philosophers who have been touched by modernity or post-modernity think, including such Wittgensteinians as Richard Rorty. Blackburn remarks:

Practice alone rules whether the choice of a mathematical or physical or psychological or modal or moral religious language stands us in good stead. The philosopher may, as a lucky amateur, make a contribution to recognising the excellence or the infirmity of some discourse, but there is no profession of being lucky. And when a discourse or way of life dies, as the religious way has effectively done in the West, this is never because it could not stand the scrutiny of Minerva, but because the consolations and promises it offered eventually lost their power to animate us. The philosopher can only ride the hearse declaiming that he thought the patient dead before the rest did.<sup>17</sup>

There is a little hyperbole here, but not much. It seems to me that this is the situation we are in. Perhaps this is a superficial way of looking at or reacting to religion, a way that has not looked at it carefully enough, sympathetically enough or long enough;

but then again, perhaps not. Phillips tries to exhibit sources of animation, but he has in reality afforded more of a reason for thinking that the discourse is, or at least should be, dead. He has tried, by assembling reminders, to show us that there are some sources in our lives and language that will reveal how the consolations and promises of Christianity, and religion more broadly, still have the power to animate us. But he has, I think, failed. It is time, if we have an impulse to do any declaiming at all, to ride the hearse.

### Notes

1. The original article, 'Wittgensteinian Fideism', *Philosophy* XLII, no. 161 (July 1967), 191–209, appears in a somewhat expanded form and with a follow-up chapter, in my *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (London: Macmillan, 1982), 65–133, along with my direct discussion of Wittgenstein on religion, 43–64. I pursue the twistings and turnings of Wittgensteinian fideism in my *God, Scepticism and Modernity* (Ottawa, Ontario: University of Ottawa Press, 1989), chapters 5–11, in my *Scepticism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1973), 23–40, in my *Contemporary Critiques of Religion* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971), 94–112, and in my *Philosophy and Atheism* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Press, 1985), 77–106, 211–27. See, as well, Michael Martin, 'Wittgenstein's Lectures on Religious Belief,' *Heythrop Journal* XXXII (1991), 369–82.
2. The essays by D.Z. Phillips that shall be the object of my attention 131–152 are his 'On Not Understanding God' and 'From Coffee to Carmelites'. All references to Phillips will be given in the text. 'On Not Understanding God' will be referred to in the text by I, followed by the page number, and 'From Coffee to Carmelites' will be referred to by II, followed by the page number. The two essays are in *Wittgenstein and Religion*, Macmillan and St. Martin's Press, 1993.
3. See H.O. Mounce, 'The Aroma of Coffee', *Philosophy* Vol. 64, no. 248, 159–73. This essay is the object of Phillips's attention in 'From Coffee to Carmelites'.
4. Stephen Toulmin, *An Examination of the Place of Reason in Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950), 202–21. I discuss limiting questions in my 'Religion, Science and Limiting Questions', *Studies in Religion* 8, no. 3 (1979), 259–65, my 'The "Good Reasons Approach" and "Ontological Justifications" of Morality,' *The Philosophical Quarterly* 9, no. 35 (April 1959), 2–16 and in my *Justification and Morals* (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Duke University, 1955), 63–72 and 216–45. See here, as well, Robert C. Coburn, 'A Neglected Use of Theological Language', *Mind* 72 (1963).

5. Donald Davidson, *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 181–242 and his ‘The Myth of the Subjective’ in Michael Krausz, ed., *Relativism* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982), 159–81; Isaac Levi, ‘Escape From Boredom: Edification According to Rorty’, *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* XI, no. 4 (December 1981) and his ‘Conflict and Inquiry’, *Ethics* 102 (July 1992), 314–34; and Charles Taylor, *Philosophy and the Human Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 15–59, 116–51.
6. Hilary Putnam, ‘Meaning Holism’ and W.V. Quine, ‘Reply to Putnam’ both in Lewis Edwin Hahn and Paul Arthur Schilpp, eds, *The Philosophy of W.V. Quine* (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1986), 405–32 and W.V. Quine, *Pursuit of Truth* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), 13–16, 50–9.
7. E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic Among the Azande* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939) and Peter Winch, ‘Understanding a Primitive Society’ in D.Z. Phillips, ed., *Religion and Understanding* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967), 9–42.
8. Davidson, *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, 183–98; Bjørn T. Ramberg, *Donald Davidson’s Philosophy of Language* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 116–40; and Simon Evine, *Donald Davidson* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1991), 134–71. If there is a verificationist streak here so be it. Not everything in verificationism is wrong, not every application mistaken.
9. See Richard Rorty on the import of dropping talk of necessity. Richard Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 19–36 and Rorty, *Objectivism, Relativism and Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
10. Charles Taylor and Isaiah Berlin (his talk of incommensurability notwithstanding) make it clear why in spite of different standards of rationality we still have overlapping criteria of both rationality and what is taken to be humanly acceptable. Taylor, *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, 116–33 and Isaiah Berlin, ‘Reply to Ronald H. McKinney, “Towards a Postmodern Ethics”’, *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 26 (1992), 557–60. Taylor goes on to show, in ways that mesh with the method of wide reflective equilibrium, how we can reason our way out of ethnocentric traps.
11. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), 19–21, 48–51, 571–87; John Rawls, ‘The Independence of Moral Theory,’ *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 47 (1974/75), 7–10; Norman Daniels, ‘Wide Reflective Equilibrium and Theory Acceptance in Ethics,’ *Journal of Philosophy* 76 (1979); Norman Daniels, ‘Reflective Equilibrium and Archimedean Points’ in J. Angelo Corbett, ed., *Equality and Liberty* (London: Macmillan, 1991), 90–109; Kai Nielsen, *After the Demise of the Tradition* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1991), 195–248; and Kai Nielsen, ‘Rawls and the Socratic Ideal,’ *Analyse & Kritik* 13, no. 1 (1991), 67–93.
12. Alice Ambrose, ‘The Problem of Linguistic Inadequacy’ in Max Black,

- ed., *Philosophical Analysis: A Collection of Essays* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1950), 15–37.
13. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Paul R. Reynolds, 1902), Lectures XVI, XVII and XX; W.T. Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1960); and Ninian Smart, *Reasons and Faiths* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1959).
  14. Anthony Kenny cites Wittgenstein as remarking in an unpublished manuscript: 'A common-sense person, when he reads earlier philosophers thinks – quite rightly – "Sheer nonsense". When he listens to me, he thinks – rightly again – "Nothing but stale truisms"'. That is how the image of philosophy has changed'. Anthony Kenny, 'Wittgenstein on the Nature of Philosophy' in Brian McGuinness, ed., *Wittgenstein and His Times* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982), 22.
  15. This claim about the incoherence of the concept of God in the developed forms of Judaeo-Christianity and Islam is articulated in the works of mine cited in note 1. David Ray Griffin, in a clearly formulated and fairminded review of my *God, Scepticism and Modernity*, has succinctly stated the core of my account, setting it out usefully in the form of seven propositions. He then argues that both my argument against theism and for atheism are incomplete. I argue that non-anthropomorphic concepts of God are incoherent (E), anthropomorphic concepts of God may be coherent, but they are superstitious and plainly involve false beliefs (F) and that concepts of God that are neither incoherent nor anthropomorphic are essentially atheistic (G). My case against theism is not exhaustive, Griffin has it, because the concepts of God referred to in the above theses (E, F and G) would have to be exhaustive but they are not. The non-anthropomorphic conceptions of God of *traditional* theism are, Griffin seems at least to agree, incoherent, but I fail to consider subtler forms of anthroporphism in non-traditional theisms such as Tennant's or Whitehead's, which also reject the conceptions of God of traditional theism as incoherent without falling into a *crude* anthroporphism or into atheism. Hence my case against theism is incomplete. I agree that it is not complete and that a complete case would have to consider such accounts and no doubt others as well. My suspicions here are (for now, they are no more than that) that if I did consider them I would find that (a) the God of such philosophers was at a very considerable distance from the God of Judaeo-Christianity and Islam, (b) that where their views are coherent they will reveal (as Spinoza's conception of God does) an atheistic substance, and (c) that their distinctively metaphysical strands are, as all such speculative philosophy, at least as incoherent as traditional non-anthropomorphic theism. It is just such metaphysical thinking that we need, à la Rorty (a former Whiteheadian), to get rid of. Arthur Murphy's 'Whitehead and the Method of Speculative Philosophy' is insightful here. See his essay by the same title in Paul Arthur Schilpp, ed., *The Philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead* (New York: Tudor, 1941), 351–80 and set it, as well, alongside his 'Moore's "Defense of Common Sense"' in Paul Arthur Schilpp, ed.,

*The Philosophy of G.E. Moore* (New York: Tudor, 1942), 299–317 and his 'Can Speculative Philosophy be Defended?' *Philosophical Review* LII (1943), 135–43. My case for atheism is also incomplete, Griffin contends, for I do not argue but simply assert that non-theistic accounts of the world are adequate. But that is not true for I do argue for their adequacy in my *Equality and Liberty: A Defense of Radical Egalitarianism* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Allanheld, 1985), my *Reason and Practice* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), my *Why Be Moral?* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1989), my *Ethics Without God*, revised edition (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Press, 1990), and in my *God and the Grounding of Morality* (Ottawa, Ontario: University of Ottawa Press, 1991). In *Reason and Practice*, *pace* Griffin, I also argue that the efforts of natural theology have failed. See part III and, more indirectly, but still crucially, part VI, chapters 31, 36, 37 and 38. See also in this connection Michael Martin, *Atheism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990). My arguments, no doubt, are in one way or another defective. That is not surprising in any event, but it seems to me that in the last three centuries there have been varied and *cumulatively* very strong arguments for the adequacy of non-theistic (i.e. naturalistic) accounts. Taken together they present a very formidable case. It is little wonder that so much of the defence of religion has turned fideistic. Moreover, and vitally, what is reasonably taken to be 'adequate' or not varies with what the alternatives are (what the live options are). If the God of traditional theism is incoherent, Wittgensteinian fideism is at best obscurantist, the God of crude anthropomorphism is something yielding beliefs which are just plainly false and non-crude anthropomorphism is (where non-atheistic) metaphysical moonshine, there is, if these things are really true, little in the way of an alternative to a pragmatic thoroughly non-metaphysical naturalism such as that articulated (though differently) by John Dewey, Jürgen Habermas and Richard Rorty. I have also turned my hand to that in my *After the Demise of the Tradition* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1989) and I have, as well, a bit in the tradition of Murphy and a bit in the tradition of Rorty, sought, without reliance on positivist assumptions, to undermine the claims of metaphysics (most particularly revisionary metaphysics). If metaphysics is a non-starter, then the very theological enterprises which rely on it, such as Paul Tillich's or Reinhold Niebuhr's or that (to quote Griffin) of such 'nontraditional theists, such as Pfleiderer, James, Tennant, Whitehead and Harts-horne', cannot, relying as they do on the constructions of speculative metaphysics, get off the ground. If I am right about the impossibility of metaphysics, there is little point in looking at the details of such views which are plainly metaphysical constructions. That is to say, key parts of their accounts rely on such constructions. I have argued for the impossibility of metaphysics in my 'Broad's Conception of Critical and Speculative Philosophy', *Dialectica* (forthcoming), 'Reconsidering the Platonic Conception of Philosophy', *International Studies in Philosophy* (forthcoming), 'Jolting the Career of Reason:



Absolute Idealism and Other Rationalisms Reconsidered', *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* (forthcoming), and 'What is Philosophy? The Reconsideration of Some Neglected Options', *History of Philosophy Quarterly* (forthcoming). See David Ray Griffin, 'Review of God, Scepticism and Modernity', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 59, no. 1 (1992), 189–90. In this setting aside of metaphysics (to return to the beginning of my essay) Phillips and I, and Wittgensteinians generally, are one, though they are usually loath to put things so bluntly. But Phillips, while abandoning metaphysics, and still seeking to keep the God of Christianity, or any other God for that matter, has only left us something akin to morality touched with emotion and obscurity.

16. Axel Hägerström, *Philosophy and Religion*, trans. from Swedish by Robert T. Sandin (London: Allen & Unwin, 1964), 224–59.
17. Simon Blackburn, 'Can Philosophy Exist?' in Jocelyne Couture and Kai Nielsen, eds, *Reconstructing Philosophy? New Essays in Metaphilosophy* (Calgary, Alberta: University of Calgary Press, 1993). The exaggeration there that needs questioning is that the scrutiny of Minerva can have no causal impute. It cannot have the grand causal impute that philosophers are self-deceived into assuming. But that it has none at all would take a lot of showing. I doubt that Blackburn really wants to make such a strong claim.