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ON FIXING THE REFERENCE RANGE OF 'GOD'

I

It is fair enough to refer, as Father Clarke does, to the God of the Christians and the Jews as 'the one infinite Creator of all other things'.¹ It is reasonable to take 'God' as a term that has certain conditions associated with it. These conditions fix its meaning. The central conditions associated with 'God' are: being infinite or unlimited, eternal, self-existent, the creator of everything that exists other than himself, the being upon whom all other beings are dependent but who depends on nothing himself, being personal, good, loving and holy. These conditions determine our concept of God, determine what could count as a referent for the term 'God'. In short, God, as John Hick remarks, is conceived in Western Religions 'as the infinite, eternal, uncreated, personal reality, who has created all that exists other than himself, and who has revealed himself to his human creatures as holy and loving'.²

Ziff surely is right in saying that in some very weak sense we have some understanding of these conditions and we understand in the same weak sense sentences in which such terms occur.³ To suppose that these conditions or sentences are unintelligible is to suppose that we cannot understand them *at all*. But it is surely not the case that we have no understanding of them at all, for we do have *some* understanding of them. Yet it is natural to argue that our understanding here is hardly *worthy* of the name, for we have no more understanding of such religious sentences than we have of the following sentences: 'Ultimate reality transmutes itself', 'An entelechy directs our organic processes', 'Consciousness is latent in the infraconsciousness', 'The soul of man is latently present in lower forms', or 'The substance of the cosmos is gracious'. After all we are given to understand, when the last sentence is uttered, that the substance of the cosmos is not ungracious or neutral, that we are talking about something fundamental to our world and the like. Similarly, when we are told that consciousness is latent in the infraconsciousness, we know that the person who asserts this wants to say that in things which are not ordinarily

¹ W. Norris Clarke, S.J., 'On Professors Ziff, Niebuhr, and Tillich' in *Religious Experience and Truth*, ed. Sidney Hook (New York, 1961), p. 224.

² John Hick, *Philosophy of Religion* (New York, 1962), p. 14.

³ Paul Ziff, 'About "God"', *Religious Experience and Truth*, ed. Sidney Hook (New York, 1961), pp. 195-202.

regarded as conscious there is, in some respects and in some way, something like consciousness or the capacity for consciousness. In short we can make something of these sentences. They are not, like 'Is rat mercator dig' or 'Drinking bad paper melodious', flatly unintelligible, although even here we would do well not to forget Ziff's point that intelligibility admits of degrees.

Yet those philosophers who have claimed that 'God governs the world' or 'The substance of the cosmos is gracious' are unintelligible have had an important though fairly specialised point in mind. They have stressed that these sentences *purport* to be typically employed to make factual assertions; believers think they are making with them mysterious factual claims; yet there occur within these sentences allegedly descriptive terms and names, for which nothing answers to the alleged description, and no one can specify what would or even in principle could count as a referent for those terms. Thus sentences like those quoted above are all pseudo-factual sentences, that is, they are *thought* to be employed as factual statements by those who use them to make claims, but actually they do not so function, for statements made by their use, by people who talk that way, are not even in principle confirmable or disconfirmable. They purport to be factual and assertive but they are not; they purport to have crucial terms which have referring uses, yet we cannot coherently describe what they are supposed to refer to. In these important respects they are unintelligible.

Flew has put the general difficulty that many people feel about the *meaning* of these religious claims with considerable vigour in the form of a challenge—a challenge that by now has been dubbed 'Flew's challenge'. It could well be put like this: 'An alleged theological or religious assertion is a *bona fide* assertion if, and only if, the person making the alleged assertion is prepared to specify what conceivable turn of events would be incompatible with it and what conceivable evidence would count against its truth.'¹

Flew asks of the putative assertions 'God loves mankind' or 'God gave us an immortal soul' what conceivable turn of events would be incompatible with them or what conceivable evidence would count against their truth. If nothing could, then these statements would be pseudo-factual statements, statements which some people (usually believers) believe to be factual, but statements which are actually devoid of factual content or significance. Yet believers, or at least many believers, do make such pseudo-factual statements. Rabbi Fackenheim's reasoning here is paradigmatic. Consider his remark 'that there is no experience, either without or within, that can possibly destroy religious faith' and his very typical apologetic point: 'Good fortune without reveals the hand of God; bad fortune, if it is not a matter of just punishment, teaches that God's ways are unintelligible, not that there are no

¹ Gareth B. Matthews, 'Theology and Natural Theology', *The Journal of Philosophy*, vol. LXI no. 3 (January 30, 1964), p. 101. For Flew's own statement of his challenge see Antony Flew, 'Theology and Falsification', *New Essays in Philosophical Theology* (London, 1955), pp. 96–99.

ways of God'.¹ This manner of reasoning is not idiosyncratic to Fackenheim. Jews and Christians alike seem to reason in this way—particularly when pressed. But if this is so—Flew's challenge goes—then certain of their very crucial putatively factual religious assertions are in reality devoid of factual significance.²

One can attempt to meet Flew's challenge in a number of ways. The most direct way is, of course, to meet the challenge head-on by showing how in principle such key religious statements are factual assertions, i.e. how they do specify what conceivable turn of events would be incompatible with them and what conceivable evidence would count against their truth.

Now, there is surely one way to do this, one way to answer Flew's challenge, that is so very obvious that one wonders, perhaps fearing one's own naïveté, whether Flew could have possibly overlooked it. Asked to specify what would count against the assertion 'God loves mankind', we could say 'God hates mankind' or 'God is really jealous of human beings' counts against such a religious claim.

But it will surely be felt that there is something fishy here, for we are using religious statements to confirm a religious statement, but the confirming statements are as puzzling as the assertions to be confirmed. Surely what is needed, Flew would no doubt argue, are straightforward non-religious, non-theological empirical statements to serve as evidence for the religious statement. But this does smoke out an assumption in Flew's challenge. That is to say, a central assumption in Flew's challenge is that a religious assertion is a *bona fide* factual assertion if and only if we can specify in non-religious, non-theological terms what *conceivable* turn of events would be incompatible with it or what conceivable evidence would count against its truth. Religious statements purporting to make factual assertions must be confirmable or disconfirmable in principle by non-religious, straightforwardly empirical, factual statements.

Why should we accept this restriction? Why must theological and religious statements be confirmable or disconfirmable by such straightforward empirical statements? Why, to be *bona fide* factual and religious assertions, must they have such clear non-religious consequences? As Gareth Matthews has appropriately remarked, 'This might be a reasonable demand if we had already established that, e.g. geometrical assertions have clear non-geometrical consequences, that physical assertions have clear non-physical consequences, that ethical assertions have clear non-ethical consequences, etc.

¹ Emil L. Fackenheim, 'On the Eclipse of God', *Commentary*, vol. xxxvii, no. 6 (June, 1964), p. 55.

² I added the qualification 'certain of their very crucial putatively factual assertions' because, as Klemke and Blackstone have pointed out, there are historical autobiographical and psychological religious statements that are plainly factually intelligible e.g. 'Jesus was born in Nazareth', 'I believe Moses lived in Egypt' or 'People without religious convictions will fall into despair'. See E. D. Klemke, 'Are Religious Statements Meaningful?' in *The Journal of Religion*, vol. XLIX (1960) and William Blackstone, *The Problem of Religious Knowledge* (New York, 1963), pp. 36–46.

But in the absence of any such established conclusions, (such a claim) appears to be discriminatory against theology'.¹

Yet isn't there a point in being discriminatory against key religious and theological statements of the type we have been mentioning? The class of geometrical assertions for which we do not ask for non-geometrical consequences are all analytic statements; when we have geometrical statements which are not analytic, as in applied geometry, we expect non-geometrical consequences. Ethical statements are commonly validated or justified by non-ethical, purely factual statements, e.g. 'Since he had a stroke, he ought to step down as premier of the country'. But a characteristic feature of purely *factual* assertions is that they must be confirmable or disconfirmable empirically. A statement would never unequivocally count as a factual statement unless it were so confirmable or disconfirmable in principle, unless, in Flew's terms, some conceivable, empirically determinable state of affairs would count against its truth or count for its truth. But, if the assertion and the denial of the religious statement in question is equally compatible with any conceivable, empirically determinable state of affairs, then the religious statement in question is devoid of factual significance. It parades as a factual claim but in reality it is not. Flew's challenge is just this: Believers regard certain of their very key religious claims—claims upon which the rest depend—as factual statements; but if they actually are factual, then it must be possible to describe two states both of which have distinct empirical content one of which actually obtains when the religious statement is true, the other when it is false. That is to say, if a certain empirically determinable condition obtains, the statement is true, if another such condition obtains, it is false. If we cannot conceive of any such conditions, then the putatively factual religious statement in question is neither true nor false. Flew challenges the believer to state these conditions of confirmation or disconfirmation, but it is characteristic of a vast amount of modern belief that its putative factual statements do not satisfy these conditions. The central religious beliefs of Christians and Jews, or at the very least of sophisticated Christians and Jews are of this kind.

A believer may indeed, and quite properly, not wish to engage in natural theology; he may be a theological non-naturalist, that is to say, he may not believe that it is either possible or desirable to support his religious claims by appeal to empirical phenomena or by philosophical or theological argument. But, theological non-naturalist or not, if certain of his most crucial religious claims are factual claims, as he believes them to be, then they must, as we have noted, be confirmable or disconfirmable in principle. It is not a question of proving his statements to be true, but of showing that they have *the kind of meaning* he believes them to have—of showing that they have *factual* content, for if they are devoid of factual content, religious claims are (1) not what

¹ Gareth B. Matthews, *op. cit.* p. 103.

believers have thought them to be and (2) they are then, at the very least, without the kind of veracity that mankind has generally thought they possessed. Hepburn is surely correct in stressing that we should not identify religion with its doctrinal formulae and there may well be, as Santayana stressed, important elements in religion which survive the dissolution of central doctrinal beliefs. Yet the doctrines remain crucial and are importantly *presupposed* in many things that religious men do. If religion becomes moral poetry—simply a set of aspirational ideals—and *if it is recognised as such*, much of its appeal, its great power to take hold of men and to transform their lives, will be irretrievably lost. Given what Judaism, Christianity and Islam have been, there are certain putative facts of a very extra-ordinary sort that a believer, to be a believer, assumes; certain key religious statements state these alleged facts; and one cannot consistently both believe that religious statements like 'God loves man', 'God sustains the universe' are factual statements and deny that they are subject to empirical confirmation and disconfirmation.

Matthews gives the theological non-naturalist another inning. The theological non-naturalist could concede that not all religious statements are compatible with all conceivable states of affairs in the empirical world; they cannot be and still be factual. But we must be extremely careful what we conclude from this. The theological non-naturalist might concede that certain of his key religious claims, since they are intended by him as factual, must be subject to empirical confirmation and disconfirmation. To be factual statements there must be some conceivable but empirically identifiable states of affairs with which they are incompatible. But we must not forget that one can understand that a given claim is incompatible with some conceivable states of affairs without claiming to know what the incompatible states are.¹

We could not understand what is meant by a given factual statement and still *not* understand what conceivable states of affairs it is incompatible with, for we would not then know its truth value, and if we did not know that, we would not know what it stated. But anyone of us could, on the authority of someone else, accept that a given type of sentence is used by some people to make factual statements and thus must be incompatible with some conceivable states of affairs without claiming to know what states of affairs such statements are incompatible with; but we would still not understand what facts such statements asserted, for we would not understand what factual content they had and thus we would not find them factually intelligible. (Indeed we would even have to take it on faith that they had a factual content. We would in such a situation understand the sentence used to make such statements as we understand 'Orange ideas are last in line'; that is to say, we would understand it as being a part of the corpus of English, but we would not understand it, as it is intended to be understood, namely, as a

¹ Gareth B. Matthews, *op. cit.* p. 105.

factual statement. More will be said in support of this in Section II.) Now it surely isn't important that a *given person* knows how to confirm or disconfirm a factual statement; what is crucial is that it be capable in principle of such confirmation or disconfirmation and in that way be subject to confirmation and disconfirmation. But believers, or at least sophisticated believers, generally use their key religious sentences in such a way that no idea is given as to what in principle would be incompatible with their assertion or denial. It isn't just that some plain fideist doesn't know what would count for their truth or falsity; no one does, not even the theological experts. It is this that keeps such statements from having factual significance.

To speak of God understanding what they are incompatible with, as Matthews does, is to go in a vicious circle, because it is just the factual intelligibility of a claim like that that is in question. And we cannot say, again as Matthews does, that it is a matter of faith with us that claims like 'God loves mankind' are factual, for if we cannot understand what it would be like for it to be a fact that God loves us or that there is a God, we do not understand *what* it is we are to take on faith. When we speak of having faith in any proposition *p*, we presuppose that '*p* is intelligible' and is indeed a genuine proposition. We can take its *truth* on trust but not its intelligibility, for unless it is intelligible to us, we do not understand what it is we are to take on trust.¹

II

Professor I. M. Crombie in two notable essays makes a determined effort to meet Flew's challenge. Unlike Hare and Braithwaite, but like Mitchell and Hick, Crombie believes that certain key theological and religious statements are statements of fact and, as such, they must be confirmable or disconfirmable in principle.² Christianity, as a human activity, involves much more than believing certain matters of fact, but it does involve belief in what the believer takes to be certain very extraordinary facts. Christians, whether they have an interest in natural theology or not, do have certain allegedly factual religious beliefs. They assert that there is a God, that he created this world and that he is our judge. These putative factual beliefs are presupposed in the other things that the Christian, or Jew, or Moslem does. They may be awkward 'facts' for him, but he must believe them nonetheless, for they underlie his entire activity. When we state such 'facts', we make what Crombie calls theological statements, though, as Crombie is quick to point

¹ Kai Nielsen, 'Can Faith Validate God-Talk?', *New Theology* no. 1, ed. Martin E. Marty and Dean G. Peerman (New York, 1964), pp. 131-149 and Kai Nielsen 'Religious Perplexity and Faith', *Crane Review*, vol. VIII, no. 1, (Fall, 1965), pp. 1-17.

² I. M. Crombie, 'Theology and Falsification', *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, ed. A. Flew and A. MacIntyre (London, 1955), pp. 109-130 and I. M. Crombie, 'The Possibility of Theological Statements', in *Faith and Logic*, ed. B. Mitchell (London, 1957), pp. 31-83.

out, his characterisation involves a wide use of the word 'theological', for they are the kind of statements which all Christians make. Unlike 'God is a necessary being', or 'God is pure act' or 'God is absolutely simple and immutable', they are made by plain believers as well as theologians. They cover what I call religious statements as well as what, on a narrower conception of 'theological', would be called purely theological statements e.g. 'God is pure actuality'. For the course of my discussion of Crombie I will accept his quite unexceptionable vocabulary.

Here Flew is met head-on: 'God sustains man and will finally redeem man' is thought by Crombie to be factual and confirmable or disconfirmable in principle. Christians and Jews must believe that there exists a being who somehow sustains the cosmos but who still is transcendent to it; and they must show how such a belief is empirically testable; that is, they must show how an assertion or a denial that there is such a non-spatio-temporal individual is not equally compatible with anything and everything that might conceivably happen in the world.

How does Crombie make out his case?

In his 'The Possibility of Theological Statements', Crombie makes some remarks about the subject 'God' that seem to me immune to the trenchant criticisms that Blackstone had made of his views.¹ Early in this essay Crombie points out that paradoxical features inherent in God-talk make it apparent that we are *not* talking about a reality 'which falls within our normal experience or any imaginable extension of our normal experience'.² God, Crombie argues, 'may not be identified with anything that can be indicated'.³ We learn from the very paradoxical features of God-talk that, if religious statements are about anything, they are about a mystery. A god who is not mysterious would not be the God of Christianity, Judaism and Islam. Yet believers are convinced that they can know something of the mystery 'God' refers to because they have a revelation, that is, a communication made to them in terms they can understand. There is a sense, Crombie argues, in which we cannot know what it is that theological statements are about, but there is another sense in which we can know enough about God for our speech about him to have an intelligible use.⁴

Yet, Crombie continues, it isn't enough simply to know the mythology in which such talk is embedded. 'God' occurs in the mythology, but if we are ever to understand it as anything other than mythology, we must finally take the hard way and discover that to which 'God' refers without benefit of mythology.⁵ In our earliest ways of thinking about God, God, like the Homeric gods, was almost a super-human being—a kind of cosmic Superman—and his grace and his wrath were something concrete, but our theological con-

¹ William Blackstone, *op. cit.* pp. 116–124.

² I. M. Crombie, 'The Possibility of Theological Statements', in *Faith and Logic*, ed. B. Mitchell (London, 1957), p. 34.

³ *Ibid.* p. 34

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 35.

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 37.

cepts have been progressively detached from such a fictitious celestial being. With this gradual demythologising the concept appears to have been slowly but unwittingly deprived of all factual content.

Crombie concedes that it 'is indisputable that there is no region of experience which one can point to and say: "That is what theological statements are about"'.¹ But this, he reiterates, does not show that theological statements have no use, for their very elusiveness is a partial definition of the use they have: it is 'a consequence, indeed an expression, of the fact that all theological statements are about God, and God is not part of the spatio-temporal world, but is in intimate relation with it'.² 'God' differs from ordinary proper names not only in the fact that, like 'Mussolini', it has certain descriptive phrases regularly associated with it, but also by virtue of the fact 'that its use is not based fundamentally, as theirs is, on acquaintance with the being it denotes'.³ 'God', one is inclined to think, is an improper proper name. 'God', we are told, stands for an individual. But what can be made of this claim when the 'normal criteria of individuality are not held to apply in this case'?⁴

The descriptions that are sometimes offered as uniquely characterising him ('the first cause', 'a necessary being') are such that nobody can say what it would be like for something to conform to one of them and thus they lack identifying force.⁵ How, then, can we fix the reference range of 'God'? If 'God created the world' is to be a factual statement 'we need to be capable of envisaging specimen situations which fall within the range and specimen situations which fall outside it'.⁶

Crombie wisely remarks that the anomalies inherent in theological statements could well be taken, *not* as attesting to their logical incoherence, but as implying that the 'formal properties of our statements alone' could also be taken as attesting to the fact that theists 'believe in the existence of a being different *in kind* from all ordinary beings'.⁷ To believe, as believers do, that God is a transcendent, infinite and incomprehensible being in an incomprehensible relationship to the universe, is, among other things, to believe that there exists an *object* of discourse which is particular but not indicable.⁸ To put the matter this way will not by itself, Crombie recognises, solve any problems but it will make it crystal clear what the believer is *not* talking about.

To conceive of the object of the believer's God-talk, we 'must be willing to conceive the possibility of an object which is neither similar to, nor in any normal relation with, any spatio-temporal object'.⁹ 'God', a believer believes, refers to a mystery beyond experience. Yet the believer also believes that there are faint traces or indicia of this Divinity 'to be detected in experience. . .'.¹⁰

¹ I. M. Crombie, 'The Possibility of Theological Statements', in *Faith and Logic*, ed. B. Mitchell (London, 1957), p. 38.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.* p. 40.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 42.

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 43.

⁶ *Ibid.* p. 46.

⁷ *Ibid.* p. 49.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.* p. 50.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

How much more can we fix the reference range of 'God'? We have been given some negative clues about what we are not talking about, but the *via negativa* cannot carry us all the way to the promised land. We must, Crombie contends, to make sense of Jewish-Christian chatter *about* God and *to* God, be able, in a positive way, to say something about what it is Jews and Christians are talking about or to. But if we listen attentively to God-talk in its living contexts, we will, Crombie argues, come to discover its reference range.

Our concept of the Divine, vague as it necessarily is, 'is the notion of a complement which could fill in certain deficiencies in our experience, that could not be filled in by further experience or scientific theory-making; and its positive content is simply the idea of something (we know not what) which might supply those deficiencies'.¹

What are those deficiencies in experience that lead us to speak of the Divine? We cannot, Crombie argues, be completely content with the idea that we are normal spatio-temporal objects. We cannot adequately describe a human being as we would 'a chair, a cabbage or even an electronic calculating machine'. We need additional concepts like loving, hoping, dreaming, etc. which do not admit of a full characterisation in purely physical terms in the way walking or digesting do. The agent's experience of such things *cannot* adequately be characterised in terms that are appropriate to spatio-temporal objects; 'part of our experience of ourselves is only describable with the aid of concepts of a non-physical kind'.²

This, Crombie argues, should *not* lead us to a Cartesian dualism; 'we should not derive from this the grandiose view that we are spirits. . .'.³ What we should recognise from this is that it gives us 'the notion of a being independent of space, that is a being whose activity is not at all to be thought of in terms of colliding with this, or exercising a gravitational pull on that'.⁴ We have no *lively* idea of such a spirit—such a being independent of space—but our inability here is not like our inability to conceive of a being corresponding to a meaningless or self-contradictory description. It is not like 'round square' or 'asymmetrically democratic potato'. "Spirit" is not an expression which affronts our logical conscience or leaves us with no clue at all. There are many different grades of "not knowing what is meant by. . ." and our ignorance of the meaning of "spirit" (that is, of what something would have to be like to conform to the requirements of this word) is not absolute'.⁵

Given such dual aspects in our own nature, we have, according to Crombie, some inkling, in our own experience, of the reference range of God-talk.

Because as agents we, or many of us at any rate, are not content to view ourselves merely as physical objects, but as something in some sense distinct from or different from physical objects, we have come to feel alienation, we

¹ I. M. Crombie, 'The Possibility of Theological Statements', in *Faith and Logic*, ed. B. Mitchell (London, 1957), p. 56.

² *Ibid.* p. 58.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

have come to view ourselves as strangers and sojourners upon the earth, and we have out of our needs posited 'a spiritual world to which we really belong'.¹

Given that we are beings with a spiritual aspect, we have been led to conceive, though surely not with any clarity, of beings—pure spirits—who are perfectly what we are imperfectly. The smattering of spirit which we find in ourselves is an ambiguous pointer to a perfect spirit—a spirit which we cannot conceive—from which our imperfect spirituality comes.

But isn't this notion of 'spirit' an illegitimate, reified abstraction? Perhaps we cannot adequately describe human actions in the terms appropriate to describing the movements of a ball or other physical objects or even movements of the human body, but this does not at all justify the claim that we have an idea of 'a spirit', or of a 'non-spatio-temporal object', or 'non-spatio-temporal person'. 'Spirit' is not the name of or a label for a distinct kind of being or entity. As Crombie well puts the objection himself: 'We should all regard it absurd to speak of beings which were pure digestions; not the digestings of animals, but just digestings. Is it not equally absurd to speak of things which are pure spirits; not the spiritualising of animate physical objects, but just spirits?'²

In response to this Crombie makes a point which is central to his whole analysis. Crombie agrees that if our claim is that we know what we mean by 'spirit' in the way we know what we mean by 'digestion' the above objection is decisive. But the theologian need not and should not commit himself to any such claim, for 'spirit' has a different role to play in religious discourse than it has in everyday life. 'Spirit' so functions theologically that in Berkeley's words 'we have no idea of spirit'; that is to say, we do not know what in its theological use 'spirit' stands for or denotes. Crombie only rejects as extravagant the claim that we have no notion whatsoever of how the word is used in such a setting. To use the word properly in a theological setting involves the deliberate commission of a category-mistake under the pressure of religious convictions that require for their expression such a deviation from what in non-religious circumstances would be our normal linguistic practice. It is indeed true that we cannot have any clear conception of such a spirit, but the word does have a use in religious and theological discourse. In fact it is the case that the theological and religious use of 'spirit'—and this use defines such meaning as it has for us in religious discourses—involves a category-mistake, but it is not *simply* a category-mistake that results from logical or linguistic confusion 'but one *deliberately* committed to express what we antecedently *feel*; and, if we antecedently feel something, the category-transgression we deliberately commit to express that feeling has some meaning—that, namely, which it is designed to express'.³

¹ I. M. Crombie, 'The Possibility of Theological Statements', in *Faith and Logic*, ed. B. Mitchell (London, 1957), p. 59.

² *Ibid.* p. 60.

³ *Ibid.* p. 61 italics mine. If we take Crombie literally here, we will have to say that his conception of what theological terms and utterances mean is unsatisfactory in much the same way Schleier-

Crombie is surely right in saying that something may be intelligible though we have no clear and distinct conception of it, but the problem is whether we understand *anything* of 'pure spirit'. Does 'a pure spirit' have a use any more than 'a pure digesting'? I don't think so. 'Pure spirit' parades as a referring expression, but unlike 'the spirit of man' or 'her spirit was down', we have no grasp at all of what we are talking about here.

But, it will be replied, Crombie frankly grants that we do not know the meaning of 'spirit' in its religious use; he readily admits that he has 'no idea of spirit'; he even recognises that such a use of 'spirit' involves a category-mistake. Yet Crombie thinks that all the same, by this deliberate committing of a category-mistake, we express that of which we have some inkling through our understanding of ourselves 'only in so far as we are spiritual'. But we have no understanding of ourselves *only* as spiritual beings. Crombie himself can make nothing of man 'as a committee of two distinct entities, body and soul'. We understand what it means to speak of our spirits being down or of our being in high spirits, but since 'spirit' is not a label for a distinct entity or being or process, we have no more idea or notion of ourselves 'only in so far as we are spiritual' than we have an idea or notion of an engine 'only in so far as it is an engine and not a piston, valve, carburator, etc.'. It isn't that we have aspects or parts here which are distinguishable but not separable, but that as we have no idea of an engine as something distinguishable from its parts, so we have no idea of a spirit as something distinguishable from a man, donkey, chimpanzee, etc. We have no idea of ourselves 'just as spirit', so this cannot serve to give us even an inkling of what a pure, bodiless spirit is. It is not that we lack a clear and precise conception of it; that is indeed tolerable; it is rather that we have no understanding of it at all. There is no 'human aspect' or 'human part' which 'spirituality' or 'spirit' names or labels that can, even in principle, be conceived of as something separately identifiable from the behaviour of an animate human being or other animal and thus serve as a model for an appropriate, though vague, understanding of what is meant by 'pure spirit' or just 'a spirit'.¹

Crombie is no doubt correct in arguing that the category mistake involved in such talk of 'spirit' does not result from pressures derived from logical theory, but results from an attempt to express what we antecedently but obscurely feel. He is also no doubt right in arguing that such a conception can

macher's claims are. If religious utterances merely express what we antecedently feel, then—given Crombie's remarks about this—'There is a God' or 'God is our creator and redeemer' come to mean something to the effect that people have feelings of contingency and finitude and come to feel a sense of absolute dependence and a dissatisfaction with the world conceived in purely materialistic terms. But this fits ill with what Crombie says in the first few pages of 'The Possibility of Theological Statements' and, as Hägerström, MacIntyre and others have shown, such a claim is open to devastating objections, for after all, this would mean that God's existence would be dependent on, because identical with, human beings having certain feelings. Axel Hägerström, *Philosophy and Religion* (London, 1964), pp. 229–259 and A. MacIntyre, *Difficulties in Christian Belief* (London, 1956). I am indebted to Lynn Boyer for the suggestion about Schleiermacher and Crombie.

¹ Richard Taylor has argued this point very well in his *Metaphysics* (New York, 1963), pp. 22–32.

'survive a clear realisation of the logical anomalies of such a belief'.¹ But, after all, what is it that we do feel? Well, as Crombie puts it, we feel our alienation, our estrangement; we feel like strangers, sojourners on the earth. We, or at least some of us sometimes, no doubt do *not* feel 'at home' in our world; the contemporary world as well as the not so contemporary world has been a place where men have frequently experienced estrangement; we dream of some perfect isle where there is no death, no hate, no feeling of not belonging, etc. Here 'another world' is intelligible though fanciful, just as anthropomorphic gods are intelligible; it could serve as our model of 'the spiritual world, to which we really belong'. Utopia may be unrealisable but it is not inconceivable; but, again once we move away from anthropomorphism, we fly into unintelligibility. We can understand what it is to talk of blessed isles, but we do not understand what it is to talk of a non-spatio-temporal world. But, as Crombie stresses, no civilised person believes that such blessed isles or spirits exist and we can no longer accept the old anthropomorphic conception of God. What we would believe in, if we were to believe in such anthropomorphic spiritualities, is intelligible enough; it is just a gross superstition. To avoid superstition, but to preserve belief, we abstract once too often and get a concept of 'Spirit' and 'a non-spatio-temporal being' that is devoid of sense; but when we engage in our characteristic religious activities, the old anthropomorphic picture re-asserts itself and our words do have an intelligible use. We unwittingly shuttle back and forth between these two contexts and easily but conveniently conceal from ourselves that we do not understand what we are talking about.

It is indeed true that it is not just conceptual puzzlement but emotional need that prompts us to make a deliberate category-transgression, but the category-transgression in both cases points to a logical confusion. We have a use of 'spirit' and 'spiritual world' that is quite intelligible but involves *no* opting for some 'non-spatio-temporal object' or, for that matter, 'a purely mental entity or part', whatever that could mean. We have no inkling or indicia in experience which point, no matter how opaquely, to a pure spirit. We have no clue to it at all. Thus our dissatisfaction with viewing ourselves as non-spiritualising organisms and our need to acknowledge a spiritualising aspect in our own actions give us no clue to what it is we are talking about when we speak of that mystery 'beyond experience' which is the divine. It gives us no understanding at all of the extra-linguistic reality—the semantics—of 'the divine' or 'God'.

But God is not only a spirit, he is infinite spirit. Let us *assume* that in one way or another I have been mistaken in my argument that Crombie has not given us an intelligible model for understanding 'spirit' in 'God is a spirit' or 'God is spirit'. But even so, as Crombie well recognises, he is not out of the

¹ I. M. Crombie, *op. cit.* p. 62.

woods yet, for even assuming, for the sake of the argument, that we understand the noun, let us now ask: 'Do we understand the adjective?' More specifically, do we understand the phrase 'infinite being'? (We certainly understand 'an infinite number of natural numbers' but 'an infinite being', 'an infinite particular' is another kettle of crawdads.) Again we can say some negative things about the use of 'infinite being'. An infinite being is unlimited; there is nothing to which such a being must conform. Yet since we cannot know God, we cannot acquire a precise sense of 'infinite being'. But for all that, 'infinite being' might have an intelligible use.¹

This term, Crombie argues, gets its sense by contrast with this universe and the things within it. Many people, who are fully aware that we cannot prove that this universe has an origin outside itself or even give good evidence for that belief, still maintain that there is something about the universe that prompts us to ask where it comes from. This gives us our inkling in experience, which enables us, in an indirect way, to fix the reference range of 'God'. To understand 'infinite' as well as 'omnipotent' and 'creator', when applied to God, we must have these feelings of the finitude and the contingency of things; we must have the conviction that the universe is, in some sense we can scarcely understand, a created, dependent, derivative universe.

If we have these feelings, then we must by contrast be able in some sense to conceive of a non-derivative (that is infinite) being. This is the closest we can get to understanding such a being. In speaking of the universe as finite, contingent or derivative, or, less technically, in making the judgment that there must be something behind all the passing show, we are exhibiting our 'intellectual dissatisfaction with the notion of this universe as a complete system'.² The concept of God, the concept of an infinite being, is that which makes contrast with what we conceive the world to be like when we feel its limitations or imperfections. To speak of God is 'to refer to the postulated, though unimaginable, absence of limitations or imperfections of which we are aware'.³

To make clear his meaning Crombie gives us an analogy. In writing an essay one might feel that a given sentence one had just written does not correctly express what one wanted to say, without, at the moment, being able to say what 'the correct version of the sentence' stands for. But one would still recognise it and welcome it if it came. We are in a similar boat about the universe. Our sense of finitude and contingency gives us an intellectual dissatisfaction with the universe; that is, it gives us a sense of its impermanency and createdness, but we still cannot say what would characterise 'a non-contingent universe'. Nonetheless as *that which* would in some sense fill out these gaps or deficiencies in our experience, we have some very

¹ John Wisdom argues convincingly in his 'The Modes of Thought and the Logic of God', that an obscure concept is not for all that meaningless. See John Wisdom, 'The Modes of Thought and the Logic of God', in *The Existence of God*, ed. John Hick (New York, 1964), pp. 275-298.

² I. M. Crombie, *op. cit.* p. 65.

³ *Ibid.*

obscure notion of the reference range of 'God'. To ask for more is to neglect the otherness and *essential mysteriousness* of God. A God who is not mysterious would not be the God of our religions.

There are some crucial differences between these cases which may render Crombie's analogy useless. From past experience with other sentences, we do indeed know what it is like finally after a struggle to get the correct version of a sentence. There may have been a time in which people did not have such an idea of a correct version of a sentence, but just felt somehow dissatisfied with some of the sentences they wrote and kept working at them until they no longer felt that way. Gradually there emerged, from situations like that, the rather vague concept of 'getting the right version of the sentence' so that now when a sentence we write seems to us somehow wrong, as mine frequently do, we have through all these past cases an admittedly very amorphous concept of what it is to get the correct version of a sentence. We only do not know, in *this particular* case, what 'the correct version of the sentence' refers to. But we know in general what we are talking about when we talk about the correct version of a sentence. But, as Peirce once observed, universes are not as numerous as blackberries. In other cases, we have not been able to contrast 'a finite, dependent universe' with 'an infinite, non-dependent being'. We have never been able with other cases of universes to independently identify or indicate such an 'infinite being', so we do not understand what is supposedly being referred to or pointed to by such terms. We speak metaphorically of their 'pointing out of experience', but we have been given no idea at all of what 'to point out of experience' means, much less of what 'to point out of experience in a certain direction' means.

But the analogy apart, what does it mean to speak of an 'intellectual dissatisfaction with the universe as a complete system'? Why qualify it with 'intellectual', why not 'emotional'?

In speaking of 'the universe' we have an umbrella term for all the finite, contingent things, processes and events that there are. Why should it be a surprise or an intellectual problem, given some minimal reflection about what a thing is, that there should be an infinite or at least an indefinite number of things that came into existence and some day, no doubt, shall cease to be? And why should it be a surprise to us that in the final analysis we can only describe what they are? Why should this give us any licence for the very odd phrase 'the universe is irrational' or 'the universe is dependent'? Why should it give us an intellectual dissatisfaction with the universe? I should think that we should rather be intellectually puzzled as to what it could *mean* to say of the universe that it is or could be other than this.

But as a harassing, disturbing kind of *emotional* perplexity, carrying with it certain verbal pictures, it is possible to understand what it would mean to say that one had a certain dissatisfaction with the universe as a complete system.

We (or at least we Westerners) in talking about things (occurrences, processes and the like) in the universe have learned to look for further things, again within the universe, upon which the things we examined depend, and then in turn we look for still further things upon which these things depend without any apparent *a priori* stopping point. Given this cultural practice, we may, in certain moods anyway, also want to ask that question about *the totality of things*, especially if we as children have been told that everything depends on God, that he is behind 'the whole passing scene' and the like. We have an anthropomorphic but intelligible picture here which will carry us along, but we can't get behind it or beyond it. It is plain enough that our question is not a rational question. It only strikes us, or strikes some of us in certain moods, as a rational, literal question because we have an emotional investment, resulting from powerful early conditioning, in so talking about the universe. We should not speak here, as Crombie does, of an intellectual dissatisfaction, but of an emotional one born of our natural infant helplessness and our early indoctrination.¹

That there is no intellectual problem here, but an emotional harassment, felt as a philosophical problem, is evident enough when we reflect that we do not understand what we are asking for when we ask for a non-derivative, non-contingent, infinite being, by reference to which we might contrast ourselves as derivative, contingent or finite beings. But without a non-vacuous contrast, without the ability to say what would and what would not be an instance of whatever it is we are supposedly talking about, we do not yet know what we are talking about. Crombie sometimes concedes this, or at least *seems* to concede it, when he says we have no idea of such a being, or confesses that such a reality is incomprehensible, for if we have no idea of it and if it is incomprehensible, then we indeed have no understanding of it and it is for us a meaningless notion. Furthermore we cannot have an understanding of one half of the pair of concepts finite/infinite, derivative/non-derivative, contingent/non-contingent without having an understanding of the other.

But, Crombie could reply, we do after all have an understanding of our contingency, finitude, derivativeness, for we, or at least some of us sometimes, have in a very vivid way feelings of contingency, finitude and derivativeness. And thus we must have *some* understanding of what it means to speak of a non-finite, non-dependent being. I, Crombie could concede, should not have said or suggested that an idea of such a being is altogether unintelligible.

¹ Many of us, or at least many of us who become intellectuals, have had in our childhood a rather minimal or mild form of religious indoctrination. There is a sense in which we lack a real participant's understanding of these forms of life. To get a sense of such an indoctrination read C. D. Broad's account of its effects on Axel Hägerström's life. (James Joyce, *The Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* is a rather more standard source here.) As I read of such forms of life, I feel a very considerable disinclination to think that all such forms of life are all right, are in good conceptual order, just as they are. See C. D. Broad, 'Memoir of Axel Hägerström', in Axel Hägerström, *Philosophy and Religion* (London, 1964), pp. 15-29.

The argument is slippery here, but let us, for the sake of the argument, accept Crombie's rejoinder here. But accepting it, it still does not at all carry us to an understanding of some object of discourse that is an infinite, non-spatio-temporal, non-indicable individual. It does not show us what would or logically could satisfy these conditions. What gives us the *illusion* that we know what we are talking about here is that ordinarily, when we feel our contingency and finitude, we contrast it with something that in a physical sense, and in a quite non-metaphysical sense, is permanent. We look up at the vast starry skies and reflect on the fact that we are, by contrast, infinitesimal, momentary creatures. We seem, and in a way are, as nothing by contrast with 'the ageless stars'. We feel to the full our mortality, our contingency, and our finitude and there is something perfectly physical, but still in a non-metaphysical way mysterious and grand with which we can and do contrast our finitude and contingency. We can, alternatively, if our grip on reality is not so good, think of a superhuman but quite non-spatio-temporal being, who is not contingent, dependent, derivative, finite *in the way we* are. This conception of a cosmic Popeye also gives us our sense of finitude and contingency and gives us our necessary contrast to insure that our concepts of finitude and contingency are intelligible. But, as Crombie stresses himself, belief in such superhuman beings is a gross superstition. In trying to distinguish our developing religious beliefs from such superstitious beliefs, we abstract once too often and come up with a pseudo-concept devoid of factual content and thus, when we assert that what this concept supposedly refers to actually exists, we have said something that is without factual intelligibility. Yet it is this pseudo-concept that Crombie has found so necessary for non-superstitious theistic belief. Crombie has tried hard to meet Flew's challenge but he has not succeeded in doing it.

III

I have not invoked in my above arguments all of the considerations that Crombie uses in elucidating the logic of God-talk. Crombie in attempting to show that certain crucial God-statements are indeed factually intelligible invokes the doctrine of analogical predication, the authority of Christ, and a theory of eschatological verification. I have elsewhere tried to show the defects in the concept of eschatological verification and in such an appeal to authority. And Crombie's use of analogy has been subject to devastating criticism by Blackstone.¹ But Crombie's claims which I have just examined are quite independent of his above mentioned claims. I have stressed these distinct, logically independent claims and have tried to show that even with them Crombie has not been able to establish how it is that his key theological

¹ William Blackstone *The Problem of Religious Knowledge* (New York, 1963), pp. 116-124.

statements have factual content. Yet they are Crombie's central arguments for delimiting the reference range of 'God'. If they collapse Crombie's account would be thoroughly gelded.

There remain, however, some additional arguments that might be used to give force to Crombie's claim to establish the factual status of theism.

Crombie has some important things to say about the role of parables in religion. The Bible abounds in parables and they are essential for our understanding of the claims of religion. 'Parable', Crombie admits, is used by him in an extended sense. The description of Christ's action of riding into Jerusalem on an ass on Palm Sunday would in Crombie's terms count as a parable, for it helps us to understand something about the extraordinary nature of the Messianic King and the non-political nature of the Messiah's kingdom.¹

Our knowledge of what God is like is only given in parables. Our understanding of many sentences like 'God is wrathful toward sinners' or 'God is our merciful Father' can only be understood within the parables of our religion. But we also come to understand that our parables do not tell us, in any literal fashion, what God is really like, e.g. how he is merciful, wrathful, etc. But we *trust* the *source* of our parables. We trust, take on faith, that our images given in the parables are faithful: that the parables are faithful, that they refer us, and refer us in a *certain direction* 'out of experience. . .'.² They point to an incomprehensible reality, totally out of our own or anyone else's experience, which is the underlying reality that we get at through a faithful parable.³

Why do we accept these parables as *faithful* parables—as parables which truly 'point out of our experiences'? If we are Christians, we do this because we trust Jesus and he authorises the parables. Jews and Moslems would accept other religious authorities as authorising certain parables as faithful, reliable parables. We, as knights of faith, simply trust the source of our parables. We trust (have faith) that our parabolic language refers beyond the parable to a God whom we cannot positively comprehend. But, if we are Christians, our trust in Jesus leads us to believe that we will not be misled by the parables as to the nature of the underlying reality referred to in the parables.

This talk, tempting as it may seem to some, won't do. I can only detail some of the reasons here. Unless we understand what is meant by saying, outside of the parable and quite literally, that there is a God and he is merciful, how could we possibly trust that Jesus or any other religious authority is not misleading us in the parable, for we could not, if we did not understand the utterance literally in its non-parabolic context, know what could count

¹ I. M. Crombie, 'Theology and Falsification' in *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, ed. A. MacIntyre and A. Flew (London, 1955), p. 118.

² *Ibid.* p. 124.

³ I. M. Crombie, 'The Possibility of Theological Statements', *Faith and Logic*, ed. B. Mitchell (London, 1957), p. 71.

as being misled or as failing to be misled by Jesus or by anyone else?¹ Without some independent way of indicating what we are talking about when we are talking about God, we cannot understand what is meant by saying that the image or the parable *is or is not* faithful. And we cannot take on trust what we cannot understand, for we cannot know *what* it is we are supposed to take on trust. If, as Crombie avers, we can *only* talk about God in images, then we cannot intelligibly speak of faithful or unfaithful images any more than we can speak of married or widowed stones. And to add insult to injury, we must note that the phrase 'parables referred out of our experience' like 'unconscious toothache' has no use. Wittgenstein *gave* 'unconscious toothache' a use; Crombie has *not* given 'referred out of our experience' a use.

It might be replied that in general we know what it is like to be misled. We know it to be a distressing, unpleasant and disheartening experience. We, in trusting Jesus, at least trust that we won't have this experience. We can know something about Jesus and we can trust that he will not mislead us about God. But this misses my last point. It is just this that we can't do, no matter how much we may *want* to, for only if we can understand what is meant by 'God' could we take anything about him on trust. In *this way* faith cannot precede understanding.²

Crombie, like Hick, makes a further argument that is important in trying to establish the factual status of theism. (I have dealt with this argument in more detail elsewhere with specific reference to Hick, so here I shall be brief.³) The argument I have in mind is Crombie's appeal to eschatological verification. To first put the matter metaphorically: we see now through a glass darkly but after our bodily death we shall see face to face. It is a mistake to argue, as some have, that Crombie here uses a theological concept to explicate a theological concept.⁴ An atheist can, and some did, believe in immortality. Let us grant—which is most surely to grant a whale of a lot—that immortality is an intelligible notion, and furthermore let us even grant that it is true that man is immortal. But even granting that, we still have not got to the promised land, the concept of eschatological verification still will

¹ Wittgenstein has well remarked '... in ethical and religious language we seem constantly to be using similes. But a simile must be the simile for something. And if I can describe a fact by means of a simile I must also be able to drop the simile and to describe the facts without it'. Ludwig Wittgenstein, 'A Lecture on Ethics', *The Philosophical Review*, vol. LXXIV (January, 1965), p. 10. In spite of Wittgenstein's emotional disquietude about this, his conclusion seems unassailable. If we have a putative non-literal or figurative mode of speech (as a simile or metaphor) and cannot possibly say *what* it is a simile or metaphor *of*, then what at first appears as a non-literal expression 'now seems mere nonsense'. If we cannot in some literal fashion assert what facts stand behind what appeared to be a metaphor or a simile then we are, in using such expressions, talking nonsense. That it is 'deep nonsense' expressive of a powerful human drive does not make it any the less nonsense.

² Bernard Williams, 'Tertullian's Paradox', *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, ed. A. MacIntyre and A. Flew (London, 1955), pp. 187–211. Kai Nielsen, 'Can Faith Validate God Talk?' *New Theology*, no. 1, ed. Martin E. Marty and Dean G. Peerman (New York, 1964), pp. 131–149.

³ Kai Nielsen, 'Eschatological Verification', *Canadian Journal of Theology*, vol. ix (1963), no. 4, pp. 271–281. See also William Bean 'Eschatological Verification: Fortress or Fairyland', *Methodos*, vol. xvi, no. 62 (1964), pp. 91–107.

⁴ William Blackstone, *op. cit.* pp. 123.

not do the job it was designed to do by Crombie. Consider the putative statement 'God is merciful'. Crombie asks:

Does anything count against the assertion that God is merciful? Yes, suffering. Does anything count decisively against it? No, we reply, because it is true. Could anything count decisively against it? Yes, suffering which was utterly, eternally and irredeemably pointless. Can we then design a crucial experiment? No, because we can never see all of the picture. Two things at least are hidden from us; what goes on in the recesses of the personality of the sufferer, and what shall happen hereafter.¹

But presumably in the hereafter, we would be in a position to know, or have some grounds for believing, that the suffering was, or was not, utterly, irremediably and eternally pointless, for then we would be in a position to see all of the picture.² But how could we even then be in such a position? No matter how long we lived in the hereafter, after any point of time, we would *not* have good grounds for asserting or denying the suffering was *eternally* pointless. We could never—and this is a conceptual and not an empirical point—be in a position to see things *sub specie aeternitatis* and grasp what the whole picture is like. At any point in time, the believer or the non-believer could justly claim that we could not make such a judgment because the whole picture wasn't in. In fact we couldn't know or even have reasonable grounds for believing that a fair sample had been taken. But even if we drop the requirement that the suffering be seen to be *eternally* pointless, Crombie's account has still not been saved.

Suppose we were somehow to discover after our bodily death that there is no suffering which is utterly and irredeemably pointless, then according to Crombie, we would have good evidence for believing in God. How so? Someone might well agree that there is no utterly and irredeemably pointless suffering and still assert that he doesn't understand what is meant by 'God' and so he doesn't understand what it means to say that God is merciful. After all the sentence 'In spite of the fact that there is no God there is no utterly and irredeemably pointless suffering' is not a self-contradiction. What, after all, is meant by the subject term 'God'? How could suffering or the lack thereof do anything to show how there might exist an object of discourse which is particular but not indicable? If we could understand what 'God' meant, Crombie's remarks might help us to give sense to 'God is merciful', but since we do not understand what 'God' means, we cannot understand 'God is merciful'.

¹ I. M. Crombie, 'Theology and Falsification', *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, ed. A. MacIntyre and A. Flew (London, 1955), pp. 124-5.

² I. M. Crombie, 'The Possibility of Theological Statements', *Faith and Logic*, p. 72. There is a clash here between the two essays. In his later essay Crombie sets conditions that are open to disconfirmation while in 'Theology and Falsification' they are not. In 'Theology and Falsification' Crombie speaks of 'suffering which was utterly, *eternally* and irredeemably pointless' (p. 124 italics mine) while in 'The Possibility of Theological Statements' he only speaks of 'utterly and irremediably pointless suffering. . . .' (p. 72).

To this Crombie might well reply: 'Indeed I haven't shown how "There is no utterly pointless and irredeemable suffering" allows us to conclude that God is merciful or to understand the word "God", but I did not try to. Furthermore, I grant that I have not shown how, on purely intellectual grounds, one could conclude that naturalistic interpretations of such experiences are inadequate. That cannot be done. But I have done what I set out to do, namely to meet Flew's challenge. I have shown under what conditions I would be prepared to give up my claim that God is merciful. I have shown how such a claim is falsifiable "in principle".'

But I do not see how Crombie has met Flew's challenge. If the statement and denial that God is merciful are both equally compatible, as they have been shown to be, with the statement 'There is no utterly pointless, irredeemable suffering' and with any possible empirical statement, which reports experiences we have or might *conceivably* have in our bodily life and in our non-bodily life (whatever that may mean), then we have not shown, as Crombie must, how the assertion or denial of the mercifulness of God have *different* factual content, and thus we have not shown how such religious statements can be used to make factual statements, for it is the believer's claim that 'God is merciful' asserts something different from 'There is no merciful God'. It is not enough that different strings of marks are used, but different factual assertions are supposed to have been made—statements with different experiential consequences. But Crombie has not been able to show how this is so; and as a result he has not been able to show that his God-statements have the kind of intelligibility that he claims for them.

Crombie, like Hick, is perfectly prepared to admit that both naturalistic and non-naturalistic interpretations of our religious experience are perfectly possible and quite plausible. He *trusts*, he says, that the non-naturalistic, theistic interpretations more adequately depict the facts. But this, he claims, is for him, and should be for all believers, a matter of *faith* and not a matter of knowledge. But if my above arguments are correct it could not possibly be a matter of *faith* for him, for he has not succeeded in establishing that his theistic beliefs are indeed beliefs of the sort he takes them to be, for he has not shown how they are expressible in factual statements, and thus he has not shown how they form an intelligible alternative to naturalism. He is in the same boat as the Edwardian who steadfastly denied that lovely young ladies sweat—they only glow. The Edwardian shows by his speech that he no doubt has a different attitude toward young ladies than the plainest of plain men, but he doesn't show that he has different factual beliefs about them.

IV

There is one further line of argumentation that Crombie avails himself of that might be taken as establishing the factual status of theism. The claim

that a sentence is used to make a factual statement if and only if it is verifiable (confirmable or disconfirmable) is, Crombie argues, a confused conflation of two distinct claims. Once they are separated, we should come to see that we have no good grounds for *denying* that our key religious or theological claims assert facts, have the logical status of factual statements.

What are these two quite different claims? The first one is the claim that a statement of fact 'must be verifiable in the sense that there *must NOT be a rule of language* which precludes testing the statement'. Whether we can *in fact* test it does not matter, but it must be *testable* in principle; that is, there must be no logical ban on verifying it, as there is (or so let us assume) on verifying moral statements like 'You ought not to kill puppies just for the fun of it' and on analytic statements like 'Puppies are young dogs'. To try to verify these statements, Crombie argues, is to show that you do not *understand* what they *mean*. That is to say, there is a logical or conceptual ban against verifying them. But if something is a factual statement there *can* be no logical ban on verifying it, but whether or not it is *in fact* verifiable is quite another matter. Crombie claims that we only require, as a necessary condition for factuality, that there be no logical ban on verifying a statement if it is to count as a genuine factual statement.

The second claim—a claim that must not, if clarity is prized, be confused with the first—is that *for any individual* fully to understand a statement, he must know what a test of it would be like. If he has no idea how to test whether a person had mutton for lunch, then he does not know what 'having mutton' means. This Crombie argues, has nothing to do with the logical status of the expression in question, but merely with its 'communication value' for the person in question. To count as a factual statement, a statement need *not* be verifiable *in this sense* or have such communication value. We would say, however, that if utterances did not have 'communication value' we could have no fair idea as to what would make them true and what would make them false.

Crombie argues that our key religious statements are only unverifiable in this *second*, quite harmless, sense. *But since they are about a mystery this is just as it should be*. But they are verifiable in the *first sense* and this is enough to ensure that they have *factual* meaning. Recall that there is no *linguistic rule* to the effect that there can be no test for 'God is loving' or 'God made man in his image and likeness'. The Christian argues that we cannot confirm or disconfirm that 'God is loving' or 'God created man in his image and likeness' because, since our experience is limited in the way it is, we as a matter of fact cannot get into the position of verifying such claims. But there is no *logical ban* on verifying them. They are perfectly verifiable in principle. This being so, they have factual meaning and after the death of the body we shall then in fact be in a position to verify such claims. This is enough to preserve their factual status.

Within the parable, 'God is merciful' and 'God loves us' even have communication value. The communication value is derived from similar utterances with a different proper name. Within the parable we understand such talk, but we do not know the 'communication value of such utterances *outside* of the parable'. But, Crombie argues, given the hiddenness, the wholly otherness, the mysteriousness of God, this is just what we should expect. As Kierkegaard has well argued, any being who didn't have these features couldn't be God. Talking within the framework of the parable—the biblical stories for example—we work in a context of 'admitted ignorance', but we accept this language because we *trust* its source. We do not know how our parable applies, but we believe—have faith—that it applies 'and that we shall one day see how'.¹ The religious man—if he knows what he is about, that is if he understands his religion—does 'not suppose himself to know what he means by his statements'. He does not suppose himself to be the Holy Ghost. But it is also incorrect to claim that he falls back, when pressed, on complete agnosticism, for he can turn for a check—for a test—to the person of Jesus, the mediator, and to the concrete process of living the Christian life. There, in the anguishing struggle to pare away 'self-hood', he will encounter divine love directly. Thus these key religious and theological statements are verifiable in principle; there is no *logical ban* on verifying them. They meet the minimum requirements for being factual statements, so it is a mistake to say that they are cognitively or factually meaningless on the very grounds that Flew and the logical positivists mark out as relevant for determining factual intelligibility. In fact we should say that within the proper religious contexts they even have communication value. 'Seen as a whole', Crombie can conclude, 'religion makes rough sense though it does not make limpidity'.²

We have already discussed the specific difficulties in trying to move from what we understand *in the* parable to understanding how the parable could refer to that which is 'out of experience'; and we have discussed the difficulty in trying to appeal to authority, Jesus' or otherwise, to settle questions of meaning. We can, as Hepburn has shown, know a lot about Jesus and about Christian living, but this does not, and cannot, take us to God unless we *already understand* what 'God' *means*. No matter how much we love and trust Jesus, his saying 'There is a God. Love Him with your whole heart and your whole mind' cannot *mean* anything to us unless we already understand the meaning of 'God'.³ It would be like Jesus' telling us to put our trust in Irglig when we had no idea of what was meant by 'Irglig'. But what is new in Crombie's arguments above, and what must be examined is Crombie's claim that there is no *logical ban* on verifying (confirming/disconfirming) 'There is a

¹ I. M. Crombie, 'Theology and Falsification', *New Essays in Philosophical Theology* ed. A. MacIntyre and A. Flew (London, 1955), p. 127.

² *Ibid.* p. 130.

³ Ronald Hepburn, *Christianity and Paradox* (London, 1958), pp. 50–90.

God', 'God loves us', 'God is merciful' and the like. *Perhaps* there is no such ban, but they still have not been shown to be verifiable (confirmable/disconfirmable) in principle, for we do not have any idea of what it would be like to confirm or disconfirm such claims. We do not understand at all what it would be like for such claims to be either true or false or probably true or probably false. It isn't that these utterances just lack 'communication value' for some (say non-believers), but since believers and non-believers alike have no idea of what would or could count as confirming them or disconfirming them, neither a believer nor a non-believer can know what it *means* to say that they are used to assert facts.

Now, Crombie could reply that to argue in this way is to miss his point. When Schlick and Carnap put forth the verifiability criterion as a criterion for what is to count as a factual statement, they were talking about verifiability *in principle*. To speak of 'verifiability in principle' is to speak, as they stressed, of the *logical* possibility of verification. When you say, Crombie could continue, that we cannot specify what would or could count as a verification/falsification or confirmation/disconfirmation of these theistic claims, your 'cannot' is a *factual* 'cannot'. You just mean that, as a matter of fact, we can think of none, but you don't rule out, by definition, that there might be some such verification. Thus you can't consistently say that it is *logically impossible* to verify them, as it is in the case of moral statements, imperatives, analytic statements, and the like. Since it makes *sense* to look for evidence for these claims, they remain verifiable (confirmable or disconfirmable *in principle*) and thus they do have a *factual meaning and content*, even under a criterion of meaning like that of Carnap or Schlick.

I think there is such a ban or at least an implicit ban on verifying non-anthropomorphic God-talk. The crucial, yet inessential, difference between analytic statements and theological statements in this respect is that in the case of these non-anthropomorphic theological statements the ban is not so obvious. We know that it is a conceptual blunder to try to verify whether 'Bachelors are really unmarried' or 'Wives are really women'. Given an understanding of the constituent terms, we know there can be no question of confirming or disconfirming such statements. But this is not true for 'There are matzos in the centre of the sun' or 'There are beings as folksy as Johnson on Mars'. There is no way of detecting whether these statements can, as a matter of fact, be verified from examining the meanings of the constituent terms in such sentential contexts. Thus, unlike with our analytic statements, we have not ruled out the logical possibility of their verification. But consider now such sentences as 'There is an infinite being' or 'A being transcendent to the universe and not spatio-temporally related to the universe directs the universe in an incomprehensible way' or 'There is a reality in all ways greater than nature'. Such sentences, sentences which are (according to Crombie) an integral part of a non-anthropomorphic theism, are sentences which, given

the meanings of their constituent terms, cannot be used to form statements which admit of the logical possibility of verification/falsification or confirmation/disconfirmation. Where 'infinite being' is being used non-anthropomorphically, there can, *logically* can, be no observing an infinite being. To understand this term, in the only way we can understand it, is to understand that there can, logically can, be no way of indicating or identifying what it purportedly refers to. The same is true of 'being transcendent to the universe', 'not spatio-temporally related to the universe', 'directs the universe in an incomprehensible way' and 'greater than nature'. Yet, if Crombie is correct, such talk is not just a part of the theologian's febrile chatter about 'God', but is embedded, as well, in a sophisticated religious man's talk of God. But Crombie's own remarks about such phrases *in effect* show that to understand the conventions governing such talk is to understand that such sentences cannot be used to make statements capable of confirmation or disconfirmation. (Of course, as we have seen at other places in his argument, he speaks as if such statements were verifiable; but we have shown that none of his arguments show that there are traces or indicia in the world pointing to an infinite individual transcendent to the cosmos.)

The fundamental thing to be noted here is this: God is *not* for a believer some kind of theoretical construct. God is *not* consciously conceptualised by the believer as a mystifying term we insert in our discourse to allay anxieties. Rather 'God' is supposed to be a proper name standing for an infinite, non-spatio-temporal, non-indicable individual, utterly transcendent to the cosmos. When we reflect on the meanings of these terms, we recognise that it would be logically impossible to verify that such an alleged individual exists. Anything that we could apprehend or could be acquainted with would *eo ipso* not be such a reality. (To speak of 'indirect verification' here will not do, for if it is *logically* impossible to directly verify x , it makes no sense to speak of indirectly verifying x , for 'indirectly' cannot here qualify 'verifying x '.)

The above line of argument indicates that there is a logical ban on the verification of such God-statements; it is only not so obvious and not so explicit. Furthermore, we are easily tricked into thinking there is no such ban, for there are different uses of 'God', including anthropomorphic uses of 'God', where 'God created the heavens and the earth' or 'God governs the world' are factual (confirmable or disconfirmable) and known to be false. But given the non-anthropomorphic uses of 'God' that Crombie so patiently details, such sentences are not used to form statements which are logically possible to verify. Crombie has not shown how his key theistic claims, when construed non-anthropomorphically, have factual intelligibility and yet, as he rightly claims, their having such intelligibility is crucial to the soundness of the fundamental claims of Christianity, Judaism and Islam.