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REALITY OF GOD

## I

Reacting against philosophers such as Braithwaite, Hare and Van Buren, caught in what not a few would believe to be an essentially positivist rut, John Wisdom and Ilham Dilman forcefully argue that there is more to religion than commitment to a way of life and yet they both are, like Braithwaite and Hare, adamant in maintaining that believers and non-believers need not differ, and indeed will not differ, when they are informed, reflective and philosophically sophisticated, 'in what they expect by way of a life after death' and more importantly still – they will not differ in what 'they infer about what lies beyond the reach of the senses' (494).<sup>1</sup> Moreover, they agree that not only can we not make any valid inferences about what lies beyond any possible reach of the senses, we cannot directly know – encounter, become acquainted with – such a reality either.

Wisdom holds, as unequivocally as he ever holds anything, that religious beliefs speak of and indeed can only speak about the world we know by means of the senses. This leads Wisdom to argue that believers should no longer construe God as a transcendent reality. Dilman, by contrast, thinks that Wisdom has been led into error here and that he is in effect confusing *metaphysical and religious transcendence*, importing an incoherent metaphysical conception of transcendence into the language of faith.<sup>2</sup>

Dilman makes a rather perplexing claim that we should examine. If we play, he tells us, Christian or Jewish language-games, if we are reasoning and acting in accordance with those modes of discourse with their distinctive framework-beliefs, we must simply take as *given*, as not to be challenged by philosophy, the 'Christian idea of God as a *transcendent* being, beyond time and our senses' with a 'Kingdom outside the world' (499). But we need to be careful here for we should not take this as committing us to an

<sup>1</sup> Ilham Dilman, 'Wisdom's Philosophy of Religion', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, v, 4 (December 1975), 473–524. Subsequent references to this article, which is the principal target of this essay, will be given in the text.

<sup>2</sup> John Wisdom, *Philosophy and Psychoanalysis* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965), pp. 149–68; and *Paradox and Discovery* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965), pp. 1–22, 34–56. Besides the essay by Dilman cited in the previous footnote, see his 'Wittgenstein On the Soul' in Godfrey Vesey (ed.), *Understanding Wittgenstein* (London: Macmillan Press, 1974), pp. 162–92 and his 'Paradoxes and Discoveries', *Wisdom: Twelve Essays*, Redford Bambrough (ed.) (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1974), pp. 78–106.

epistemological and presumably a metaphysical theory of any kind at all (499). In accepting such notions – as all Christian and Jewish believers must – we are not accepting a *philosophical* account of any sort, including any account or a theory ‘about what is meant by “God” in the scriptures. . .’ (499). But how then are we to take such remarks about transcendence? Dilman says, surprisingly, and to me at least remarkably, that it is ‘a direct statement about the kind of God Christians worship’ (499). And then, making perfectly apparent his Wittgensteinian, neutralist and second-order conception of philosophical activity, he remarks that the philosophic task, given such a direct statement about the kind of God Christians worship, cannot be to criticize this concept, but one to ‘elucidate its logic’.<sup>1</sup> This means giving a perspicuous representation of the ‘Christian idea of God as a transcendent being, beyond time and our senses’, ‘with a Kingdom outside the world’. But – and this is the striking thing which makes Dilman’s account very different from the usual thing – this does not mean we must construe God’s transcendence on some model of an invisible Gardener (499).<sup>2</sup> It does not mean that we have to invoke any distinctive metaphysical doctrines at all.

I am not about to accept such meta-philosophical, meta-theological restrictions on what can constitute proper philosophical activity and on what our squarification base in philosophy should be. But I do not wish to challenge this here, at least not immediately and directly. Instead I will continue for the sake of the discussion to make the sort of assumptions that are being made by Dilman about the nature of philosophy and, recognizing that they are both not uncontroversial and not unusual, go on to see, particularly given his way of doing philosophy, what kind of elucidation of God’s transcendence Dilman can give us and to ask of it whether it matches our pre-analytic understanding of that mysterious God Christians, Jews and Muslims worship and whether it squares with our well-considered convictions as informed and reflective human beings.

## II

One of the first things we need to do, Dilman argues, is to break the spell of a philosopher’s way of regarding such phrases as ‘beyond our senses’, ‘transcendent’, ‘timeless’, ‘outside this world’ and the like. We are accustomed to seeing them against the backdrop of metaphysical philosophies and what Axel Hägerström called metaphysical religiosity.<sup>3</sup> These notions,

<sup>1</sup> Michael Durrant’s alternative characterizations should be contrasted with Dilman’s and indeed Malcolm’s, Phillips’ and Winch’s readings here. See Michael Durrant, *The Logical Status of ‘God’* (New York: Macmillan, 1973) and his *Theology and Intelligibility* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973).

<sup>2</sup> Antony Flew’s discussion of the invisible gardener is, of course, the paradigmatic contrast with Dilman and Wisdom. See A. G. N. Flew, ‘Theology and Falsification’, in A. G. N. Flew and A. MacIntyre (eds.), *New Essays in Philosophical Theology* (New York: the Macmillan Company, 1955), pp. 96–9.

<sup>3</sup> Axel Hägerström, *Philosophy and Religion*, translated by R. T. Sandin (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1964), pp. 175–223.

Dilman claims, have been thoroughly and trenchantly exposed and are indeed incoherent conceptions not tied into any genuine language-games. But this should not at all intimidate the philosopher of religion trying to make sense out of Christian and Jewish religious discourses. For there are *religious*, specifically Christian and Jewish, construals of these notions, which are quite distinct from such metaphysical construals. Moreover, they do not suffer from the defects of these metaphysical conceptions. That sometimes philosophers, including Christian and Jewish philosophers, mix them up only attests to the fact that philosophical mistakes are made, including often deep meta-philosophical mistakes about how best to proceed.

Dilman tells us that when the Christian God is described as being 'beyond our senses' it is 'the world of the senses' that is in question. In religious discourse 'the world of the senses' is not used to contrast with 'the world of intelligible objects'; rather what is being talked about is a way of living and conceiving of one's life 'in which we seek the satisfaction of sensual pleasures, bodily appetites and their derivatives – the desire for riches, power and fame' (501). A person taken up in such a mode of life is a person whose concern for these pleasures and satisfactions overshadows all his other concerns (501). In saying God is 'beyond our senses' one is saying that God will not be found in such a world, that a person with such a conception of life, living in such a world, can never find God. The thing to see is that if a genuine knight of faith were to say 'that God is not visible to the senses, he would not be making the epistemological point that you cannot see God through a telescope, but a different conceptual point, namely that God does not reveal Himself to one who is immersed in a life of the senses' (501). If one is claimed by the flesh, one necessarily turns away from God and cannot respond to the events in one's life from the perspective of the love of God. Here we can see that we have a conceptualization of the transcendence of God that in no way commits one to the metaphysical conception of transcendence that Wisdom rightly criticizes (506).

There is no explaining what in genuinely religious terms it means to believe in a transcendent God without bringing in such distinctive *religious* conceptions. It is a central aspect of Wisdom's work – an aspect which Dilman accepts as the correct way to view the matter – that God is so conceived that he is not conceived of as 'an object among or beyond the objects we know. . . ' (519). That point is a conceptual point, but to deny that God is either an object or a 'super-object' – a 'supernatural something' – is not, Dilman contends, to suggest 'that God is a myth or that He does not exist' (514). But it does imply a rather more subtle point than is in the minds of many people about what it does mean and does not mean to believe in God or to affirm his existence (519). To come to understand what it means to believe in God, it is central to come to understand what it means to worship, thank, fear or love God (519).

## III

Let us start by asking what it is on Dilman's account to love God and to be thankful to God for one's existence. A believer who gradually becomes 'immersed in the world of the senses', i.e. taken up in 'the satisfaction of sensual pleasures, bodily appetites and their derivatives – the desire for riches, power and fame' – is a person who has been 'claimed by the flesh' and cannot love God or have a sense of what Dilman calls religious transcendence (501).<sup>1</sup> Nor is it the case that God could reveal himself to a person as long as that person remained in such a state (501). If 'these concerns for these pleasures and satisfactions overshadow all other concerns', if these claims have such a settled hold on him, then 'he can no longer look at things and respond to them from the perspective of the love of God' (501). Dilman goes on to remark that this 'antithesis is bound up with what it *means* to believe in a transcendent God; you cannot explain what kind of God Christians believe in without bringing in such matters' (501). It is in this sense that the remark that God is not visible to the senses makes a conceptual point (501). We need to recognize that 'God is transcendent in the sense that turning towards him means "renouncing the amenities of the world"' (502). Such a person, if he also comes to love the afflicted for themselves alone, thereby loves God. That is what it is to love God and to have an understanding of God's transcendence. Yet such a person might very well, and with perfect consistency, reject, as either nonsense or false, any metaphysical claim that tries to make 'God' refer to a being, to being or to an entity that exists independently of the universe and which is an entity or a being or being of a radically different kind than any of the entities or beings in the universe. Yet such a believer, Dilman contends, continues to believe in God's transcendence, in the *religious* sense just specified, while rejecting any belief in the reality of a *metaphysically* transcendent being. Indeed he would typically regard such a conception as incoherent.

We come to understand what God is and what His transcendence is by coming to understand what love is. We understand the latter by coming to understand selflessness. The sort of selflessness that Dilman has in mind is the way in which the good Samaritan was selfless in attending to the dying stranger by the roadside. In an important way, this is to deny oneself without any silliness such as regarding the body as evil or renouncing simple pleasures. 'A selfless person', Dilman remarks, 'is not one who is incapable of passion, one who finds no joy in life. He is one whose pleasures are not self-centered, not of the kind in which the "ego thrives"' (514). If one is selfless, one cares for others and for ideals such as justice and human freedom and equality in a way that is not measured by their utility to the person doing

<sup>1</sup> Ninian Smart sets out succinctly the sense of and the import of the traditional conception of transcendence in his 'Mystical Experience', *Sophia*, 1, 1 (April 1962), 19–26.

the caring or of any projections about how things will turn out. 'Whether or not one serves justice does not depend on the outcome of one's actions; it depends on one's attitude of will' (505). His very love of justice is its own reward. What gives him heart to struggle for the achievement of justice is not, in any important way, what may lie in his own future but simply that justice may be achieved and a human flourishing obtain. To be so unequivocally committed is to 'die to the world', 'to transcend the world', 'to transcend the senses', 'to not be held captive by worldliness' and this is what it is for 'the kingdom of God to be within one'. This is what it is to love God and to believe in a transcendent God, a God transcendent to the world. To have such an attitude to life is to transcend the world. To find God 'is to accept and love everything that happens, recognizing that there is no reason why it should be so and not otherwise' (503). To be thankful to God for one's existence is to accept and indeed to joyfully accept one's life as a life in which one gives one's self to justice without reservation and in which one does not put considerations regarding one's future before one's concern for justice (505). In that perfectly metaphysically unproblematic way one dies to the world.

## IV

Dilman has contended, not implausibly, that what it means to believe in God is shown in what it means to love God and to be thankful to God. We have, in attempting to follow out Dilman's reasoning here, shown something of what, on Dilman's account, it is to love God and be thankful to him and in that way we have come to have some understanding of what it is, on his account, for a believer to believe in God and to believe in his transcendence. It is important to recognize that this account is *metaphysics-frei* and that to believe in a transcendent God in Dilman's distinctive sense in no way commits the believer to an epistemological or metaphysical theory. It is a characteristic philosophical mistake, a mistake that philosophical therapy should seek to cure, to try to account for God's transcendence by invoking a metaphysical and epistemological theory in which 'the antithesis between what belongs to this world and what is supernatural' is turned into 'a contrast between what is here and what lies elsewhere, beneath, behind or beyond space, or into a contrast between what is now and what is to come later' (503). With such a philosophical move, Dilman contends, as Wittgenstein Fideists generally do, 'one will either deny God's transcendence or transform it into something logically incoherent' (503).<sup>1</sup> God is transcendent but, as we have seen, God is not to be construed as a being beyond the objects with which we are familiarly acquainted (519). To have a genuine sense of transcendence (this religious transcendence) is to come to understand and to take to heart the incontrovertible fact that this universe – our world

<sup>1</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Note Books 1914–16*, p. 81.

– ‘is absolutely devoid of finality’, while at the same time feeling thankful for this world and feeling a sense of gratitude for one’s life and for the world, no matter what one’s condition or what happens. One feels, if one has this religious sense of transcendence, gratitude for the world as one feels gratitude for beauty. Moreover, the gratitude the believer feels and the beauty the believer sees in the world is inseparable from his sense of the contingency of life (578). The love and gratitude that emerges at such an appreciation must therefore be ‘unconditional or invulnerable to what is so’, since it is inseparable from an awareness of the contingency of life and the utter lack of finality in the universe.

## v

Accounts such as Dilman’s have provoked very different reactions. (It should be remembered that Dilman’s account is perhaps in a certain way the most developed statement of a view that is also held by Rush Rhees, Peter Winch and D. Z. Phillips and has, as well, a certain resemblance to Paul Holmer’s and Norman Malcolm’s accounts of religion.)<sup>1</sup> Such accounts seem to not a few people to be deep and probing, reflecting a genuine understanding of what religion is; to others, however, they seem outrageous accounts which refuse to face fundamental problems about belief in God and which replace genuine philosophical analysis with obscurantist literary *schmaltz*. I have at different times ambivalently had both reactions. My considered convictions now are that such accounts – and Dilman’s in particular – have some deep things to say that philosophers and theologians tend to ignore. In trying to understand what it is to believe in God and what it is to be religious, it is important to have these conceptions clearly before us. But I also believe that in important ways Dilman, like Phillips and Winch, is evasive and in effect obscurantist about how we are to understand the concept of God and about *what* it is we are talking about in speaking of God. He never squarely faces the problem of reference but simply drops hints here and there about what he wouldn’t say and makes some elusive remarks about what he would say. I shall try to show what it is of importance that he leaves out of consideration.

Dilman is prepared to accept Wisdom’s critique – in reality here very much like a positivist critique – of metaphysical conceptions of transcen-

<sup>1</sup> Rush Rhees, *Without Answers* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), pp. 110–32; Peter Winch, *Ethics and Action* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), pp. 8–49; Peter Winch, ‘Meaning and Religious Language’, *Reason and Religion*, Stuart C. Brown (ed.) (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1977), pp. 193–221; D. Z. Phillips, *Faith and Philosophical Enquiry* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970); D. Z. Phillips, *Religion Without Explanation* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1976); Paul Holmer, ‘Wittgenstein and Theology’ in Dallas M. High (ed.), *New Essays on Religious Language* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969); Paul Holmer, ‘Atheism and Theism’, *Lutheran World*, xii (1963); Paul Holmer, ‘Metaphysics and Theology: The Foundations of Theology’, *The Lutheran Quarterly* (1967), and Norman Malcolm, ‘The Groundlessness of Belief’, in *Reason and Religion*, Stuart C. Brown (ed.) (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1977), pp. 143–57 and 186–90.

dence: a critique which seems to exhibit their incoherence in a way not dissimilar to the way in which Wisdom would maintain that Locke's idea of a substratum was incoherent. Dilman accepts this account but is concerned to show that he can accept it without 'denying the intelligibility of God's transcendence' (498-9). I shall in turn be concerned to argue that he has not been able to give a reading to God's transcendence which squares with a reflective sense of the core commitments of Christianity and Judaism. It leaves out certain things which are essential to those faiths and does not enable us to sort out what is crucially different between believers and non-believers even when our reference class includes philosophically and scientifically sophisticated people.

Dilman stresses that crucial differences between the believer and non-believer come not only in how they live their lives and face death but also in how they see life as a whole (482). These crucial differences, he believes, are not what on a naive view they might be taken to be, for these crucial differences remain even when 'there is no difference between them in what they expect by way of a life after death and no difference in what they infer about what lies beyond the reach of the senses' (494). But what then are the crucial differences and what, in particular, are the crucial differences not alluded to above? It sounds like Dilman is claiming that the religious believer has beliefs which are 'concept forming' while the non-believer does not. Believers, Dilman seems at least to be saying, have beliefs, which provide them 'with a perspective on life, a fixed framework for their judgements and decisions', while non-believers neither do nor can have such conceptions (494). But surely that, while being questionable in its own right, only gives us what are plausibly necessary conditions for religious belief; it does not provide us with both *necessary* and *sufficient* conditions which would enable us to sort out what marks the crucial differences between believers and non-believers. Certainly various varieties of secular humanists, including Marxist humanists, could have distinctive concept forming beliefs. Like the believer they use them in forming a perspective on life as a whole and in developing a fixed framework for their judgements and decisions. *Perhaps* this makes it true that they have a systematic ideology; but that does not add up to their having a religion; it certainly does not entail they have a belief in God. A thorough-going atheist or agnostic could, and typically would, have a perspective on life as a whole with distinctive concept forming beliefs and a fixed (relatively fixed) framework for his judgements and decisions. But this does not convert him into a believer in God.

So what then are the crucial differences between the believer and the non-believer and, most particularly, between the Jew or Christian, on the one hand, and the atheist or agnostic, on the other? It is, Dilman to the contrary notwithstanding, not only religious beliefs which provide or are a measure, means of assessment or criterion, but the fundamental beliefs of

any systematic view of the world such as Marxism, Freudianism or secular humanism (where that differs from Marxism) (485–94). They too can involve a ‘commitment of the will’ and thereby what Dilman calls a ‘dimension of the personal’.

The answer that seems most naturally to insinuate itself at this point as constituting the crucial difference between say a Christian and an atheist is that the Christian believes in God and the atheist rejects such a belief. The difference here could (*but need not*) encompass all the differences in affective disposition and moral orientation that Dilman draws to our attention while still essentially involving a difference in intellectual orientation about what kinds of being or entities there are or can be. It is such a difference in intellectual orientation that is crucial, for believers and non-believers very well could have the same moral orientation and affective dispositions coupled with very different intellectual orientations.

Dilman wants to resist this but has he any other way of setting out how we should distinguish between believers and non-believers? I think he believes he has in the way he sets out in detail the moral orientation of a believer who has overcome the ‘domination of the world’ and a non-believer who is caught up in things worldly. But this distinction does not, as important as it is for characterizing an essential difference between people with importantly different moral orientations, capture what crucially distinguishes believers from non-believers, unless we want, by stipulative re-definition, to convert certain atheists and sceptics (Einstein, Russell, Freud, Horkheimer and Adorno for example) into believers. To do this surely would constitute a tinkering with our language-games in a way that a Wittgensteinian could hardly approve. There are through and through atheists who have just that life-orientation that Dilman describes as the heart of what it is to believe in God and to commit your life to God.

Traditionally it has been responded that, Dilman’s considerations aside, there still remains an essential difference, for, in addition to having that moral orientation to the world and to life, the believer actually believes that there is a God, that God actually exists. Dilman is in effect obscurantist here. Often he sounds like an atheist or like a ‘Godless Christian’, such as Braithwaite, Hare or Van Buren.<sup>1</sup> It seems to be the case that he is treating God as essentially a moral category, rejecting all distinctive Christian cosmological conceptions as myths, generated by bad philosophical conceptions. Yet he also regards these ‘Godless Christians’ as reductionists and uses, without much in the way of elucidation or demythologizing analysis, God-talk in such

<sup>1</sup> What I mean by ‘Godless Christianity’ can be seen from reading Braithwaite, Hare and Van Buren. See Richard B. Braithwaite, ‘An Empiricist’s View of the Nature of Religious Belief’ in Malcolm L. Diamond and Thomas V. Litzenburg, *The Logic of God: Theology and Verification* (Indianapolis, Indiana: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1975), pp. 127–48; R. M. Hare, ‘The Simple Believer’ in *Religion and Morality*, Gene Outka and John P. Reeder Jr (Garden City, New York, Anchor Books, 1973), pp. 393–427 and Paul M. Van Buren, *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel* (New York: the Macmillan Company, 1963).



a way that it certainly looks as if he is utilizing the full-blown Jewish and Christian conceptions with their embarrassing and indeed very problematic cosmology. That, at least, is the way such talk would naturally be taken. Yet Dilman talks as if he wants to excise these conceptions as bits of bad philosophy that have intruded into religious discourse, but he also repeatedly uses terms which appear at least to carry that traditional sense in contexts which seem at least to call for that troublesome reading. But he does not offer an alternative analysis of the concept of God that at all faces, even to attempt to neatly dispose of them, referential problems. He sometimes reasons as if he had de-mythologized God-talk in a way not radically different from Braithwaite and at other times he uses such talk in a way that seems at least to require the traditional reading of the terms – a reading that he officially rejects. Unfortunately, he does little to show us a way out of the dark woods, for he offers little in the way of an alternative analysis of the concept of God.

## VI

I should give the above general criticism flesh. Consider the following religious utterances, all of which either are or are very like utterances liberally used by Dilman in his articles. My problem with them is that while we – as much as we ever have – have some idea what to do with them when construed according to the traditional Judeo-Christian cosmological picture, we are quite at sea about knowing how to take them when to believe in God comes to having and taking to heart a perspective on life as a whole and not at all a conceiving of the object of our belief as an entity or being ‘among or beyond the objects we know’ (509). God remains characterized by Dilman as a ‘He’ and that He is taken to exist but, where belief in God comes just to having an orientation toward and a perspective on life, it is not clear what such talk can mean where such personal pronouns are also used. We have the following utterances all at least apparently tied to such a problematic.

1. God exacts from those who love Him the consent to be nothing.
2. A person’s life may be touched by God in such a way that it shatters her and she is born to a new life.
3. God is to be worshipped.
4. One can find God only in a life of inwardness.
5. To keep one’s inwardness one must subject one’s life to God.
6. We give thanks to God no matter what.
7. Some people in their personal lives are turned towards God and some are turned away from God.

He also accepts, as standard remarks of theology which philosophy (on his view) cannot criticise but can only elucidate, the following:

8. God is a person.
9. God is a transcendent being.

- 10. God is timeless.
- 11. God is not visible to the senses.

All of these sentences readily warm to the traditional cosmological readings, but it is not clear how they are to be taken on Dilman's account, if they are to be distinct from something which is as available both to the atheist and the Christian as something they all could, and perhaps would, accept as true. He must preserve some distinction here if his account is to be non-reductionistic.

To see how this is so let us concentrate first on the first batch of sentences (1-7). 1 would presumably be paraphrased roughly in something like the following way:

1<sup>1</sup>. To take a religious perspective one must attain a detachment from self-interested and self-directed concerns and one must become selfless.

Dilman would, I believe, paraphrase 2 as

2<sup>1</sup>. A person, thoroughly taken up with worldly pursuits, taking religion more or less as a convention or with no religious beliefs at all, may come, perhaps through some traumatic experience, such as the death of her son, to have a new set or at least an altered scheduling of moral categories which gives her a sense of selflessness and a detachment from worldly concerns.

Sentence 3 would take the following paraphrase into

3<sup>1</sup>. One is to love selflessly and to commit one's life to such a selfless love of humanity.

(We can plainly see here how far this is from how such a sentence would normally be understood.)

Similarly 4, 5, 6 and 7 would, I believe, be paraphrased by Dilman in something like the following way.

4<sup>1</sup>. One can find genuine liberation only in a life of inwardness.

5<sup>1</sup>. To keep one's inwardness one must firmly orient one's life to a life of selfless love and to an acceptance of the finality of finitude in the ordering of one's life and in the attitudes one has toward the world.

6<sup>1</sup>. We gratefully and indeed joyfully accept our lives no matter what happens.

7<sup>1</sup>. Some people in their personal lives are worldly in their orientation and some people are selfless and detached from the world.

Sentences 8 to 11 are more characteristically theological and such utterances are less frequently employed by Dilman, but he does take them as among the sentences philosophers must just accept from theologians and try to provide a perspicuous representation of them which keeps their original sense. His paraphrases of 8 to 11 would be something like the following:

8<sup>1</sup>. The world as a whole should not be viewed as utterly impersonal but as a place where persons and personal values count.

9<sup>1</sup>. To take a religious perspective on the world as a whole is to attain selflessness and detachment and to overcome worldliness and bondage to the senses.

10<sup>1</sup>. To attain a religious perspective on life is to attain a perspective in which life, including such ideals as justice and the flourishing of human love, are valued independently of how things turn out. Love and goodness are valued in themselves and not just for whatever instrumental value they may happen to have. To attain such a perspective is to attain a life devoted to inwardness.

11<sup>1</sup>. For those immersed in a life of the senses there will be no understanding of the religious perspective.

These paraphrases are rough and no doubt Dilman or someone else with such an approach could improve on them. But I believe I have captured the sort of understanding these Wittgensteinians have of such conceptions. (If they mean something more *of a quite different sort*, they should explain what this 'more' is.) These readings – excising the old myth-eaten cosmological conceptions – are all of the sort that are perfectly available to the atheist or sceptic. There are, of course, things here that might be *normatively* disputed but there is nothing here that is not available to the person rejecting a religious perspective and available not just as an object of contemplation but as something to commit oneself to. Perhaps Dilman could provide paraphrases of the above sentences which were less crude, but it does not appear to be the case that these paraphrases would provide us with anything that was not perfectly available to the atheist. It does not appear to be the case, that is, that they would be fundamentally different from the paraphrases I have put in his mouth.

Dilman, as I remarked initially, is anxious to maintain against Braithwaite and Hare that religion is more than a commitment to a way of life. Believers, he claims, see the world as a whole differently from non-believers 'even when there is no difference between them in what they expect by way of a life after death and no difference in what they infer about what lies beyond the reach of the senses' (494). I have questioned whether Dilman has been able, without appealing to such metaphysical beliefs, to sort out believers from non-believers, though he has sorted out people with different schemes of values. But the differences captured here are not even co-extensive with those differences which distinguish believers from non-believers. One can have the scheme of values Dilman designates as 'religious' and actually be either religious or non-religious.

Dilman, like the other Swansea Wittgensteinians, insists his account is not reductionistic. It does not, he would have it, turn religion into moral parables linked with certain distinctive stories which need only be entertained. But it remains unclear in what way for him religion is anything other than a distinctive moral perspective on life as a whole. (Similar things could be said of Winch and Phillips.) The distinctive cosmological claims seem at least to have been excised and this makes his account appear at least to be very reductionistic indeed.

What saves it – and again similar things could be said here about Phillips

and Winch – from being decisively so tagged is its vagueness and its use of religious discourse, having the old ring, in an unexplicated way. There seems to be plenty of room for the old philosophical manoeuvre of first saying it and then taking it all back. Dilman remarks for example:

You cannot say: ‘Believing in God is one thing, trusting in Him another’. For responding to God, in the different ways that this finds expression in a man’s life, is part of what we *mean* by ‘believing in God’ (487).

Normally, in such a linguistic environment, we would take ‘responding to God’ in the old way with all its problematic cosmological freight. Dilman there uses it in such a way so as to encourage that understanding. But he also tells us to reject the old cosmological conceptions as incoherent. But it is difficult to understand how we are to take such a passage – indeed even to understand such a passage – if we construe ‘God’ in the manner dictated by Dilman’s conceptions about how such concepts are to be understood. I suppose ‘responding to God’ there is to be paraphrased as ‘selflessly orienting your life’. But it is not clear that this is what Dilman means here and the linguistic environment encourages a richer reading. Lack of explicitness and a surfeit of vagueness ward off more decisive critiques.

Dilman might respond by invoking what has been called the *sui generis* platitude. He might say that sentences 1 to 11 say what they say and no paraphrase will exactly reduplicate their meaning. This no doubt is often, perhaps even always, true but, that notwithstanding, sentences 1 to 11 are very problematic and surely encourage the traditional metaphysical readings that Dilman rejects as incoherent. Many people, including some religious believers, are baffled by them and there are people, even with dispositions to respond as believers (reflect on Dostoyevsky’s characters), who are also disposed to believe they are incoherent or at least thoroughly problematic. The trouble is to understand them and we must seek what devices we can find to guide us in our understanding. In such a context a paraphrase and a reading may be in order, even if no claim is made to having captured the exact meaning of the paraphrased sentence. Indeed, since the paraphrased sentence was itself unclear, no notion of capturing its ‘exact sense’ makes any definite sense. If we knew what that sense was we would not need the paraphrase. But a paraphrase, which gives a specification of meaning, can be of value in just those circumstances. It can perhaps give us some understanding where before we had little or none.

Dilman generally recognizes this and seeks to provide it for God-talk, but, if my criticisms are near their mark, he has not been able to articulate a sense of that talk that would distinguish the claims of the believer from those of the religious sceptic. If he now backs away, under such philosophical pressure from all paraphrase, and invokes the *sui generis* platitude, he will leave us with just the baffling unexplicated talk, with its characteristic perplexities, from which he sought to deliver us. His conceptual therapy will not have worked, for we will remain baffled by talk of God.