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Part I

Philosophical Theism

1

Philosophical Theism

Richard Swinburne

1 History of the programme

I shall understand by 'philosophical theism' the programme of giving a clear coherent account of the nature of God (broadly consonant with what has been believed about him by Christian, Islamic and Jewish thinkers of the past two millennia), and providing cogent arguments for the existence of such a God.

Providing arguments – or, more loosely, reasons – for the existence of God has been a concern of many theologians of the Christian tradition (over the whole of this period). St Paul's comment that 'the invisible things' of God 'are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made',¹ gave Christian backing to the message of the middle chapters of the Old Testament *Wisdom of Solomon* that the existence and order of the Universe shows it to be the work of a divine creator. This Biblical tradition merged in the Hellenistic world with the arguments of Plato to the idea of the good and to the Demiurge, and with the arguments of Aristotle to the existence of the First Mover. And so many Christian theologians of the first millennium had their paragraph or two summarizing a cosmological argument or an argument from design. But it is normally only a paragraph or two,² and the reasoning is quick. My explanation of why they directed so little energy to this issue is that they felt no need to do more. Most of their contemporaries accepted that there was something like a god; what the theologians needed to argue for were the specially Christian doctrines about him.

But in the medieval west theologians began to produce arguments for the existence of God at considerable length and with considerable rigour; and they did their best to give a coherent account of the nature of the God whose existence was purportedly demonstrated by these

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arguments. The opening questions of St Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae* provide the paradigm of medieval philosophical theism. The pre-Kantian Protestant tradition also had a concern with this activity – more with arguments, than with clarifying the divine nature, and the arguments tended to be less rigorous. The classical Protestants thought that while there were good arguments for the existence of God, (or rather more loosely, that nature showed clearly its creator) this was of little use to humans corrupted by sin.³ Liberal Protestants, by contrast, argued at some length 'from nature up to Nature's God' and thought their arguments important. It was only with the arrival of Hume and Kant that some major parts of the Christian tradition abandoned the project of natural theology, and they were in my view ill-advised to do so.

It needs to be emphasized that none of those thinkers in the first 1750 years of Christianity who thought that there are good arguments for the existence of God, thought that all or most believers ought to believe on the basis of those arguments, nor that conversion required accepting those arguments as cogent.⁴ To be a Christian does involve believing that there is a God, but most Christians may well have taken God's existence for granted. Most converts may have believed beforehand that there is a God; their conversion involved accepting more detailed claims about him. And if they did not initially believe that there is a God, they may have come to believe on the basis of religious experience in some sense rather than as the basis of natural theology. Nevertheless, most Christian thinkers before 1750 held that there are these arguments available, and that those who do not initially believe that there is a God and are rational can be brought to see that there is a God by means of them.⁵

It is an interesting question why so much energy was put into the project of philosophical theology in the medieval west, when one might suppose that there was no more need of it than in earlier centuries – there were no more sophisticated atheists around, one supposes. But the answer, I suspect, is that there is a bit of the sophisticated atheist in most believers, and St Thomas and Duns Scotus were providing tools to deal with that. However, as we all know, atheism went public and expanded in the eighteenth century, until in our day in the West a large proportion of the population are atheists, and quite a lot of those who practise a theistic religion have serious doubts about whether there is a God. Yet the practices of the religion only have a point if there is a God – there is no point in worshipping a non-existent creator or asking him to do something on Earth or take us to Heaven if he does not exist; or trying to live our lives in accord with his will, if he has no will.

If someone is to be rational in practising the Christian, Islamic or Jewish religion, he needs to believe (to some degree) the credal claims which underlie the practice. These claims include as their central claim, one presupposed by all the other claims, the claim that there is a God. If someone does not believe or only half-believes, the faithful are required (as part of their religious practice) to help. Help may take various forms. If we can help someone to have a deep and cognitively compelling religious experience, let us do so; but religious experiences cannot be guaranteed. And the only way which requires the non-believer simply to exercise his existing faculties in the pursuit of something which he is almost bound to regard as a good thing (to discover whether or not there is a God), is to present him with arguments whose premises are things evident to the non-believer and whose principles of inference are ones he accepts, and to take him through them. And the only premises evident to all non-believers are the typical premises of rational theology – the existence of the world, its orderliness, the existence of human beings and so on. In our age, above all ages, theistic religion needs to have available natural theology. And since the reasons why people do not believe are not just the lack of positive grounds for believing, but because they believe (or suspect) that there are internal incoherences in the concept of God, or that the existence of suffering disconfirms the existence of God, the believer needs to help them to see that this is not so. There are other means which might have success in our day – the need for philosophical theism is great – if in fact there is a God.

But atheists are also interested in these questions, and they endeavour to show that there is no God; and since showing that an argument is not cogent or a concept is not coherent involves the same techniques as the contrary endeavour, we may also call their activity ‘philosophical theism’. And if, in fact, there is no God, it is good that some shall help others to a right view of this matter, both for its own sake and also to save them from spending their time in pointless activity.

Such is the history and utility of philosophical theology. How is it pursued today and what are its prospects? A lot of very thorough, detailed and rigorous work has been done with the aid of all the tools of analytical philosophy in attempting to clarify what would be involved in there being a God, and attempting to show the claim that there is a God to be coherent or incoherent. As regards positive arguments for the existence of God, different philosophers of today have revived different kinds of argument from the past. Some have revived ontological arguments, either producing variants of one or more classical arguments or producing

some entirely new ontological argument. Ontological arguments of course differ from all the other traditional arguments in that they start, not from something observable, but from purported logically necessary truths. It is easy enough to produce an ontological argument with the premises evident to all; and easy enough to produce a (deductively) valid ontological argument. But it is very hard indeed – in my view quite impossible – to produce an ontological argument with both characteristics. It seems to me fairly evident that the proposition ‘there is no God’ while perhaps false and even in some sense demonstrably false, is not incoherent. It does not contain any internal contradiction. And if that is so, there could not be a valid argument from logically necessary truths to the existence of God. For if there were such an argument the existence of God would be logically necessary and its negation self-contradictory.

Then there is the tradition of attempting to produce deductively valid arguments from premises evident to the senses. It is a not unreasonable interpretation of Aquinas’s *Summa Theologiae* 1.2.3. that he sought there to give five such arguments. Those in our day who have sought to give such arguments have for the most part tried to do so with the aid of Thomist (or neo-Thomist) terminology. But the enterprise of producing such arguments is also, I think, an enterprise doomed to failure. For if it could be achieved, then a proposition which was a conjunction of the evident premises together with ‘there is no God’ would be incoherent, would involve self-contradiction. But again propositions such as ‘there is a Universe, but there is no God’, though perhaps false and even in some sense demonstrably false, seem fairly evidently coherent.

So my own preference is for the third tradition of natural theology. This begins from premises evident to the senses and claims that they make probable the existence of God. Such arguments purport to be inductively cogent, not deductively valid arguments. Arguments of scientists or historians from their data of observation to their general theories or claims about the past or the future, also do not purport to be deductively valid, merely inductively cogent. Thinkers were not very clear about the distinction between inductive and deductive arguments during the first one thousand years of the Christian era, and not much clearer until the eighteenth century. So it would be anachronistic to say that the patristic writers were seeking to give inductive, or alternatively deductive arguments. But the arguments of so many British empiricists of the eighteenth century, culminating in Paley’s *Natural Theology*, do seem to me fairly clearly and intentionally inductive.

Arguments against the existence of God of all three kinds have also been produced in our day, but – for reasons of time – I shall concentrate on the positive.

2 My own version

I model my own arguments for the existence of God on those of the third tradition. Each of the various arguments from various observable phenomena does, I argue,⁶ give some support to the claims that there is a God; and, taken together, they make it ‘significantly more probable than not’.

I have sought to show this with the aid of confirmation theory (that is, the calculus of probability, used as a calculus for stating relations of evidential support between propositions. I represent by $P(p/q)$ the probability of a proposition p on evidence q . I use Bayes’s Theorem,

$$P(h/e \ \& \ k) = P(e/h \ \& \ k) \frac{P(h/k)}{P(e/k)},$$

to elucidate the relation between the probability of a hypothesis h on evidence of observation e and background knowledge k , and other probabilities. To use this calculus does not involve supposing that exact values can very often be given to the probabilities involved. That exact values cannot often be given is evident enough even when h is some paradigm scientific theory. It would be very odd to say that the probability of Quantum Theory on the evidence of the photoelectric effect was 0.3217. Some probabilities can be given exact values – but this usually happens only when the probability is 1, 0 or 1/2. More often, all we can say is that some probability has some rough value – more than this and less than that, and that in consequence some other probability has some other rough value – close to 1, or fairly high or less than that. My concern has been to prove that when e is a conjunction of propositions which set out the publicly available evidence which has been used in arguments for and against the existence of God, and k is tautological background evidence (viz. contains nothing relevant to h) and h is the existence of God, $P(h/e \cdot k)$ is ‘significantly greater than 1/2’.

All that the calculus does is to set out in a rigorous formal way the factors which determine how observational evidence supports more general theory. The relevant points can be made easily enough in words, but less rigorously and with their implications less clear. What the calculus brings out is that a general theory h is rendered probable by observational evidence e (and if we put k as a tautology, we can now ignore

it), insofar as (1) $P(e/h \& k)$ (the posterior probability of e) is high, (2) $P(h/k)$ (the prior probability of h) is high, and (3) $P(e/k)$ (the prior probability of e) is low. The first condition is satisfied to the extent to which you would expect to find e if h is true. Obviously a scientific or historical theory is rendered probable, insofar as the evidence is such as you would expect to find if the theory is true. (I can say 'the theory is rendered probable insofar as it yields true predictions' but only if it is understood that the 'predictions' may be evidence observed either before or after the theory was formulated. It seems irrelevant to whether evidence supports a theory whether it is 'new' evidence found by testing a theory, or 'old' evidence which the new theory explains.)

However, for any e you can devise an infinite number of different incompatible theories h which are such that for each $P(e/h \& k)$ is high but which make totally different predictions from each other for the future (that is, predictions additional to e). Let e be all the observations made relevant to your favourite theory of mechanics – let's say General Relativity (GTR). Then you can complicate GTR in innumerable ways such that the resulting new theories all predict e but make wildly different predictions about what will happen tomorrow. The grounds for believing that GTR is the true theory is that GTR is the simplest theory. $P(h/k)$ means the a priori probability that h is true, or – put less challengingly – is the measure of the strength of the a priori factors relevant to the probability of h . The major such a priori factor is simplicity. The simplicity of a theory is something internal to that theory, not a matter of the relation of the theory to external evidence. Another a priori factor is content – the bigger a theory, the more and more precise claims it makes, the less likely it is to be true. But we can ignore this factor if we are comparing theories of similar content.

$P(e/k)$ is a measure of how likely e is to occur if we do not assume any particular theory to be true. The normal effect of this term in assessing the probability of any particular theory h , is that e does not render h very probable if you would expect to find e anyway (for example, if it was also predicted by the main rivals to h which had significant prior probability).

For the purpose of applying this apparatus to assessing the theory that there is a God, the philosophical theist needs to spell out what is meant by this claim. God is supposed to be roughly a person without a body, essentially omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly free, perfectly good, creator and sustainer of any universe there may be, a source of moral obligation, eternal and necessary.⁷ It needs to be spelled out what each of these properties amounts to, and to be shown that possession of each is compatible with possession of the others. Inevitably, to talk of the source of all being involves using words in somewhat stretched

senses – just as, in a humbler way, does talk about photons and protons. But it needs to be made to some extent clear just what the stretching amounts to in each case, and to be made plausible that when words are used in the stretched sense, the claims about God made with their aid are coherent. It's no good saying 'all our talk about God is metaphorical'. For if anyone is even to have a belief that there is a God, let alone have grounds for that belief, there must be some difference between that belief and the belief that there is no God, or the belief that there is a Great Pumpkin, or whatever. And to explain to a non-believer what that belief is, one must use words which she understands. That involves making it clear when words are being used in stretched senses and – insofar as it can be done – what are the boundaries of these senses. The claim that there is a God may of course not be a fully clear claim, but unless it is moderately clear, it cannot provide backing for the practice of religion nor can arguments be given for or against it.

I argue that any being who is essentially omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly free, and everlasting necessarily has the other divine properties, and that the cited properties fit together in a very neat way so that the claim that there is a God is a very simple claim, because it is a claim for the existence of the simplest kind of person there could be. Persons are beings with power to bring about effects intentionally, beliefs (true or false) about how things are, and some degree of freedom to exercise their power. God is postulated as a being with zero limits to his power, to his true beliefs, and to his freedom. Scientists and others always prefer on grounds of simplicity hypotheses which postulate one entity rather than many, and entities with zero or infinite degrees of their properties rather than some finite degree thereof. They postulate that photons have zero mass (rather than some very small mass, equally compatible with observations); and they used to postulate that light and the gravitational force travel with infinite velocity (rather than some very large finite velocity, equally compatible with observations) until observations forced a different theory on them. Although the existence of anything at all is perhaps enormously improbable a priori, the existence of a very simple being has a far higher prior probability than does the existence of anything else (except insofar as the latter is rendered probable by the former).

Yet if there is a God, it is not improbable that he should create a universe, an orderly universe, and within it embodied rational creatures such as humans. For God being good will seek to bring about good things. It is good that there should be a beautiful universe, Beauty arises from order of some kind – the orderly interactions and movements of objects in

accord with natural laws is beautiful indeed; and even more beautiful are the plants and animals which evolved on Earth. It is a further good that there should be human beings who can choose between good and bad, choose whether to grow in power and knowledge, and so choose whether or not to enter into a loving relationship with God himself. Humans have limited power over their bodies and acquire naturally some knowledge of how the world works. We have to know which bodily movements will make what difference – and that involves there being regularities in the world which we can grasp. The movements of solid bodies in empty space follow (approximately) Newton's laws. Given such simple regularities, we can discern them and use them to increase our power over the universe – to develop our agriculture, to make houses and bridges, to send humans to the moon. So God has a further reason to create a universe orderly in its conformity to rational laws – in giving humans significant choices which affect themselves, each other and their relation to God.

But unless there is a God, it is most unlikely that there would be a universe at all. The universe is a big thing consisting of very many separate objects of varying finite size and mass. That it should exist on its own, uncreated, is therefore – by normal scientific criteria – very much less likely than that God should exist. And it is most unlikely that the Universe would come into existence caused by anything else than God, because any other possible cause is much less simple than God. And it is immensely unlikely that if there is a Universe, it should be governed by simple natural laws. For natural laws are not entities. To say that all objects obey Newton's laws is just to say that each object in the Universe behaves in a way that Newton's laws state, that is, has exactly the same properties of movement in reaction to the presence of other objects, as does every other object. It is immensely unlikely that every other object should behave in exactly the same way – a priori, unless there was a common cause of their having the properties they do. And any other possible cause is much less simple than God. (Even if you suppose some impersonal cause to be just as simple a postulate as God, there is no reason why it should bring about this sort of universe.)

So the hypothesis of theism satisfies the three criteria which I have drawn from Bayes's Theorem and are independently plausible, for the probability of a theory. The only evidence which I have mentioned is that of the existence of the Universe and its 'conformity to natural laws'. In my books I have also adduced much further evidence – the initial state of the Universe being such and the laws having such characteristics as to bring about somewhere in the Universe animals and humans

(the 'fine-tuning' of the Universe); the existence of consciousness, various providential aspects of nature, the public evidence about the life, death and purported resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, other reports of miracles, and the very widespread phenomenon of 'religious experiences', in the sense of experiences which seem to their subjects to be experiences of God. The case for the existence of God which I have just summarized is a cumulative one from many pieces of evidence. Arguments against the existence of God (for example, from evil) have also to be brought into the equation, and it needs to be shown that the hypothesis of theism retains its probability despite these.

3 Objections

What of objections? Ever since people have given arguments for the existence of God, others have tried to find fallacies in them. There are innumerable objections both to the general programme and to particular versions of it. I confine myself to objections to the arguments for the claim that there is God, and – for reasons of time – shall not consider objections to the coherence of that claim. I begin with objections to the general programme.

First, there is the objection that if arguments for the existence of God (and certain claims about what he has done) are cogent, then a prudent person will try to do what is good out of self-interest – for (probably) God will approve such behaviour and reward it. The total commitment demanded by religious faith would no longer be virtuous. Kierkegaard wrote that the suggestion that faith might be replaced by 'probabilities and guarantees' is for the believer 'a temptation to be resisted with all his strength'.⁸ Of course religion involves commitment, that is, living by the assumption that the relevant religious system is true. But there is always risk in a commitment to an assumption which may be false – you may spend your life pursuing good things which you will never attain, and lose good things which you could have attained. Yet if the former good things are good enough – and plausibly the Beatific Vision of God in the company of the saints for yourself and your fellows (as well as many earthly good things) is good enough, it is a risk worth taking. The prudence of seeking such a good, despite risk of failure, is virtuous. And if it is probable (though not certain) that there is a God, it is probable that you have a duty to commit yourself to God. But there is nothing virtuous in living your life on an assumption which is certainly false – for that is pointless. Given that there is some risk that

there is no God likely to reward you, as the third tradition of argument allows, this criticism fails.

Then there is Kierkegaard's objection from the opposite angle, directed at the third tradition of argument, that it would leave us with an uncertain belief open to revision – and that religion requires more.⁹ I do not think that religion does require more – by way of belief. St Paul reminded us that 'we see in a mirror darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I have been known,'¹⁰ and that 'by hope were we saved: but hope that is seen is not hope: for who hopeth for that which he seeth?'¹¹ Religion requires more than tentative commitment, but there is no difficulty in giving that commitment to a system which is only probably true.

Then there is the objection that arguments for the existence of God, especially ones which involve probabilities, are sophisticated things; and only intellectuals can understand them. Even if this were true, it is no good objection to the project – intellectuals need their views on religion by which to live as much as does anyone else; and if their need alone can be satisfied, that is something. But in fact I suggest that almost all traditional arguments for the existence of God (apart from the ontological argument) codify in a more rigorous form the vague feeling of so many humans that the existence of the world with its various particular features cries out for an explanation, and that God's action in creating and sustaining it provides that explanation. That feeling is then open to various atheistic objections which can be dealt with in turn by more rigorous formulation and defence.

Then there is the Barthian objection that philosophical theism has too anthropomorphic a view of God. But the Christian view of God is in crucial respects anthropomorphic. It is central to the Christian tradition (as to the Jewish and Islamic traditions) that God 'created man in his own image',¹² and the very many theologians of the two Christian millennia who have dwelt on these words have seen the 'image' as primarily a matter of rationality and free will (and so of power and knowledge), that is, properties contingently present in humans in a small degree which are necessarily present in God in an infinite degree. God is like man because man is like God. If we are to be concerned with arguments for the existence of the God of Christianity, we must – with all the qualifications about stretched language mentioned earlier – be anthropomorphic about God.

There are many other general objections to the programme of philosophical theism – I find, for example, eight separate ones, in Hume's *Dialogues*. But my view is that most such objections derive any force

that they may have from a positivism now largely rejected in philosophy generally (and, in particular, in philosophy of science). There is, for example, the view that causation concerns patterns of regularity in observable objects, and there is no sense in talking of the unobservable cause of a unique object. But while no object (even God) is unique in all respects, all objects are unique in some respects; and science is finding out rather a lot about the unobservable causes of the observable. I think that there is little force in any of these general objections to the programme of philosophical theism. What I believe to be much more important are detailed objections designed to show that some particular theistic claim is incoherent, or that all available versions of theistic arguments do not work. If I am right in my claim that the probability calculus captures the principles of inductive inference in a precise form, then if someone can find a fault in my version of the programme, that will suffice to render the whole programme worthless.

There are objections to each of my claims about the three elements on the right hand side of Bayes's Theorem, when this is applied to assessing the probability of the existence of God (h) on the evidence of observation (e) and tautological background evidence (k). First, the objector claims that $P(e/h \& k)$ is very low indeed, because of the problem of evil, including pain and other suffering, which is very – if not totally – improbable if there is a God. In my view the problem of evil constitutes the most substantial of all objections to the existence of God. But even to begin to meet it, my paper would need to deal solely with it. So all that I have space to do here is to say that some evils are necessary conditions of greater goods. It is not improbable that God will bestow on some creatures not merely the good of pleasure; but the goods of a free choice of good or evil which makes a significant difference to the world, the opportunity to show patience, courage and compassion, and the privilege of making it possible (by our suffering) for others to evince these virtues, and much else. I claim that God (logically) cannot provide us with these good things without causing or allowing suffering, and that it would not be wrong of him to cause or allow the suffering for a limited period in a limited way for the sake of the goods which it makes possible. But to show this at adequate length requires a very substantial theodicy, for which I can only put down a marker.¹³

Then, the objector claims that $P(h/k)$ is low because the hypothesis of theism is not nearly as simple as I suggest, and the hypothesis makes such big claims (its content is so large). I do think that this is a very substantial objection, although in the end mistaken. The content of any hypothesis able to explain the existence of the Universe will have

to be pretty large. The hypothesis of theism postulates one God of infinite power, knowledge and so on, rather than one or many finite ones. In the course of a very interesting paper Mark Wynn has pointed out that there are very many different possible hypotheses, each postulating different numbers of gods with different powers, whereas there is only one hypothesis postulating one God of infinite power. Hence, he claims, although each of the former hypotheses might be less probable a priori than the hypothesis of theism, the disjunction of the former is plausibly more probable than the hypothesis of theism.¹⁴ But if the order of the world is to be explained by many gods, then some explanation is required for how and why they cooperate in producing the same patterns of order throughout the Universe. This becomes a new datum requiring explanation for the same reason as the fact of order itself. The need for further explanation ends when we postulate one being who is the cause of the existence of all others, and the simplest conceivable such – I urge – is God.

Finally there is the objection that we can pass no judgement on the value of $P(e/k)$. What possible factors could lead us to a view about how likely it would be that there would be a universe, whether or not there is a God? But that is easy enough to answer. The probability of e is the sum of probabilities of the different ways in which e can come about, that is, the sum of the probabilities of e on each rival hypothesis, multiplied by the prior probability of that rival hypothesis. $P(e/k) = P(e/h \& k) P(h/k) + P(e/h_1 \& k) P(h_1/k) + P(e/h_2 \& k) P(h_2/k) \dots$ and so on. By earlier arguments, all hypotheses of similar content which lead us to expect e are much less simple than h . h_1 and the others are such that $P(h_1/k) \ll P(h/k)$. Hence $P(e/k)$ is not too much larger than $P(e/h \& k) P(h/k)$. When we pass judgement on the probability of any scientific theory for which there is no greatly relevant contingent background evidence k , we pass just this sort of judgement.

4 Rival programmes

How has the programme of philosophical theism engaged with other programmes represented at this conference? By far the closest programme is that of Reformed Epistemology. Indeed, I do not regard it as a separate programme, but rather as one end of a spectrum, of which philosophical theism is the other end of a spectrum of programmes defending the rationality of belief in a traditional Christian God (on a univocal understanding of 'rationality'). The canonical presentation of Reformed Epistemology is the volume edited by Plantinga and Wolterstorff, *Faith*

and Rationality.¹⁵ These writers, and all who have followed them, have used all the tools of modern analytic philosophy, as have I and many others who have tried to develop philosophical theism. What is central to Reformed Epistemology is the claim that the belief that there is a God can be entirely rational without being based on arguments from evidence; it may be 'properly basic', the sort of belief which, like mundane perceptual beliefs such as 'I see a desk', is rationally believed without being based on other beliefs. I agree with that – belief that there is a God can be, for some people, properly basic. And almost all philosophical theologians of the past two millennia would think that too. So long as it stares you in the face that some belief is true and you have no contrary evidence, then that belief is properly basic, and if anyone today is in that position with regard to their belief that there is a God, that belief is, for them properly basic. But one difference between myself and many Reformed Epistemologists is that in my view the number of people in the western world in this situation in 1999 is fairly small. Most people today need something by way of positive argument for their theistic belief to be rational. But this difference concerns merely the utility of the programme of Reformed Epistemology, not the truth of its doctrines. Some Reformed Epistemologists however seem to be saying that there are no good arguments for the existence of God – and there of course I disagree for reasons given earlier in this paper. Sometimes also they seem to be moving towards the claim that it is not rational to believe in God on the basis of arguments; and of course here too I disagree.

Until 1986, the main claim of Reformed Epistemology was simply the negative claim that the claim of others that 'there is no God' is not properly basic for anyone who had no good justification. Since then Plantinga has developed his theory of warrant, warrant being whatever it is that turns true belief into knowledge.¹⁶ According to this theory a belief B is warranted if it satisfies a number of conditions, the crucial one of which is that 'the cognitive faculties involved in the production of B are functioning properly',¹⁷ and that means functioning the way your creator intended them to function (if you have a creator), or (if you do not have a creator) functioning the way evolution in some sense 'intended' you to function. The application of Plantinga's theory of warrant to religious belief has the consequences that if there is a God, it is probable that a belief that there is a God is warranted; and if there is no God, it is probable that a belief that there is a God is not warranted. Even if this conclusion is correct, it is of little use to us, unless we have reason to believe that there is (or is not) a God, and that involves having a belief about the issue which is rational in a different sense from Plantinga's

'warranted'. In this alternative sense our beliefs are rational if they are probable on the evidence available to us (which will include the apparent deliverances of religious experience, as well as publicly available evidence). The probability involved here is the logical or epistemic kind with which I was operating earlier. The rationality of his or her beliefs in this sense is something internally accessible to the subject and (to a considerable degree) to everyone else as well. A reformed epistemologist needs to hold that theistic beliefs are rational in this sense, if he is to justify his claim (to himself and the world) that they are probably true. I hope that Reformed Epistemology, all of whose tools and many of whose results I endorse, will recognize the need for this strong internalist kind of rationality and not saddle itself with an exclusively externalist epistemology.

How does Philosophical Theism interact with Wittgenstein? Wittgenstein is of course one of the great philosophers of all time, recognized as such by both the analytic and continental traditions of philosophy. Any philosopher must take account of Wittgenstein; and I like to think that I have learnt a little from him and applied it to one or two particular issues. As we know, he wrote very little directly about religion, and his main influence on the philosophy of religion has been through the application by others (and especially D.Z. Phillips) of what he wrote about language in developing those few explicit remarks about religion. The resulting position has often been called 'Wittgensteinian fideism'. Now the way in which I, or indeed most analytical philosophers, approach some writer is to try to analyse what they have written in terms of a few philosophical claims and various supporting arguments; and then to attack or defend these claims by further arguments. To approach any Wittgensteinian in this way can be a frustrating experience. One is told that one's account of the philosophical claims is far too naive, and that to produce head-on arguments for or against such claims is a naive way to deal with them. One is finally left with the impression that one can only understand what the writer is saying if one endorses it.

My account of what D.Z. Phillips has been claiming over many years in fidelity to Wittgenstein's few explicit remarks on the subject, is that religion is a self-contained practice (of prayer, worship, public and private conduct, and the way we think about things), commitment to which involves no metaphysical or historical beliefs different from those of people who do not practise the religion. As an account of the Christian religion, as it has been practised by so many over two millennia, this seems manifestly false. Of course there have been a few sophisticated modern people who have gone through the motions of prayer and worship, and taken Christian stances on particular moral issues, without

having any specifically Christian historical or metaphysical beliefs. Some have even used the traditional language – for example, ‘Last Judgement’ – in some ways utterly different from the ways of the normal Christian. But to understand Christianity, it’s no good reading only Simone Weil – you need to read St Paul, Irenaeus, and Gregory of Nyssa and Luther and Francis de Sales and so on, and so on. Wittgensteinian philosophy of religion suffers from a very one-sided diet of examples. I know that there are differences between the writers I mention, but they are as nothing compared with the difference between them and, say, Don Cupitt. But having written this, I know that I shall be accused of failing to understand the subtleties of language and religion; and I await the accusation with due trepidation.

Then we come to Process Thought. I have always found the few writings of Process thinkers which I have read (despite the complexities of Whitehead’s metaphysics), relatively clear. But they expound a metaphysic which seems to me a lot less probable than a more traditional Christian one. The attempt by Process Thought to dispense with the category of substance seems to me to fail, in particular in its account of persons. A subsequent person being me is not a matter of its causal relations or relations of similarity to earlier events. Many different series of subsequent events could have very close such relations to the earlier events which were mine. Yet – with immense plausibility – there would be a truth about which series of subsequent events were mine. Being me can, in consequence, only be analysed as being the same continuing substance (that is, soul). The category of substance is unavoidable; and one everlasting substance on which all depends is required to make sense of the world. While in this way, like all philosophical theists, I object to Process Theology’s conceptual scheme; unlike some philosophical theists, I accept from Process Theology certain more particular views about God. God is not outside time; and God does not know infallibly the future free choices of creatures.

And finally what of Post-Modernism and Critical Theory? I am alas too ignorant of critical theory to have engaged with it. In philosophy generally I think of post-Modernism as the view that there is no truth, there are just sentences expressed in different circumstances to which people react in different ways and then utter more sentences; and I find this view in the little I have read of Derrida. As I have read so little of the Continental philosophy from which post-Modernism emerged, like so many other analytic philosophers, what I have just written may be a poor caricature; and, if so, I apologize – I am here to learn better.

But if post-Modernism is the view which I have stated, it seems to me manifestly false. For how could it be a view, a belief about how things

are, unless either it is true or it is false? And in that case there is truth – either the truth of post-Modernism, or the truth that post-Modernism is false. If the former, then post-Modernism contradicts itself; and hence only the latter is possible. Now maybe post-Modernism is a bit subtler than I have represented it. Maybe it claims that there are some truths but not many. But it seems to me far more obvious than most things, that a lot of modern science is true, that the world is very old, that there are people beside myself and so on. These things are far more obvious than any philosophical doctrine. We have an enormous number of true beliefs. Post-Modernism may be warning us that different groups have different criteria of rationality and that there is not one true set of criteria. Although there are small differences between groups as to what they take as evidence for what, I do not myself believe that those differences there are greatly significant; humans have very similar criteria to each other. This is a contingent claim and I could be wrong. But if I am wrong, that does not damage my claim that there is one true set of criteria. They are those of my group, which – I am quite sure – are those of all who will hear or read this paper. We all have the modern scientific criteria of what is evidence for what, and to say that we have these criteria is just to say that we believe that the results which they yield about what is probable to be correct results. If we thought that there are no true criteria of what is evidence for what, we would think it just as likely that if we jump from a window we will fly, as that we will fall to the ground. Our conduct shows that we do not so think. One can however take a post-Modernist view about religion without becoming susceptible to the difficulties of a more general post-Modernism. One can claim that there are no religious truths (because religious claims are incoherent), or that – if there are – it is equally rational to hold any religious belief. The answer to this more detailed claim (itself presumably purportedly true and asserted as rational) is the detailed programme of philosophical theism sketched earlier. Detailed challenges to the coherence of traditional theism can be met; and it can be shown probable, and so more rational to believe than its negation, by correct criteria of rationality.

Notes

1. Epistle to the Romans 1.20.
2. For a slightly longer form of argument from design for the existence of God, and argument therefrom about the nature of God, *see* the opening chapters of St John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*.

3. See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book 1, ch. 5.
4. Conversion of course involves not merely coming to believe certain propositions, but setting yourself to act on them in certain ways. But my concern here is only with the former necessary but not sufficient element in conversion. Hence I write of the person who does practise a religion as 'the believer' and the one who does not as 'the non-believer'.
5. 'Not that the same method of instruction will be suitable in the case of all who approach the Word...the method of recovery must be adapted to the form of the disease... [It] is necessary to regard the opinions which the persons have taken up, and so frame your argument in accordance with the error into which each have fallen, by advancing in each discussion certain principles and reasonable propositions, that thus, through what is agreed on both sides, the truth may conclusively be brought to light. Should [your opponents] say there is no God, then, from the consideration of the skilful and wise economy of the Universe he will be brought to acknowledge that there is a certain overmastering power manifested through these channels.' – St Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism*, Prologue (trans. W. Moore and H.A. Wilson, in *Selected Writings of Gregory of Nyssa*, Parker and Co., Oxford, 1893).
6. See my *Existence of God*, Clarendon Press, revised edition, 1990 (and the short simplified version, *Is There a God?*, Oxford University Press, 1996).
7. In the Christian tradition God is 'three persons in one substance' – that is, three persons each of whom has the listed divine characteristics – the Son and the Spirit being eternally and necessarily caused to exist by the Father. Arguments to the existence of God are then best construed as arguments to the existence of God the Father, from which the existence of Son and Spirit follow – in my view by logical entailment. The simplicity of God which I consider in the text is the simplicity of God the Father – that a simple theory has complicated consequences does not make it any less simple. I ignore this complication in subsequent discussion, for the sake of ease of exposition. For my own developed account of the divine nature see *The Coherence of Theism*, Clarendon Press, revised editions, 1993; and *The Christian God*, Clarendon Press, 1994.
8. S. Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (trans. H.V. and E.H. Hong), Princeton University Press, 1992, p. 11.
9. For reference to this objection of Kierkegaard both to natural theology and to historical arguments about the life and teaching of Jesus, and for a developed response both to this objection and to the previous Kierkegaardian objection, see Robert M. Adams, 'Kierkegaard's Arguments against Objective Reasoning in Religion', in his *The Virtue of Faith*, Oxford University Press, 1987.
10. I Corinthians 13.12.
11. Romans 8.24.
12. Genesis 1.27.
13. I devoted two and half chapters of *The Existence of God* to theodicy (pp. 152–60 and chs. 10 and 11), but feeling the need for more extensive treatment, have now written a full-length book on this – *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, Clarendon Press, 1998.
14. Mark Wynn, 'Some Reflections on Richard Swinburne's Argument from Design', *Religious Studies* 29 (1993), 325–35. Wynn points out that I need to

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make this kind of move in a different connection in order to defeat an earlier objection of Mackie.

15. A. Plantinga and N. Wolterstorff, *Faith and Rationality*, University of Notre Dame Press, 1983.
16. See Plantinga's general theory of epistemology in *Warrant: the Current Debate and Warrant and Proper Function*, Oxford University Press, 1993; and its applications to Christian belief, in *Warranted Christian Belief*, Oxford University Press, 2000.
17. *Warrant and Proper Function*, p. 194.

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