



In Between Ayer and Adler: God in Contemporary Philosophy

RONALD F. MARSHALL

First Lutheran Church of West Seattle, Seattle, Washington

Philosophy's purpose for parish pastors is no longer very clear.¹ However, if it were clearer, philosophy would be less quickly judged as being irrelevant for, and even an evil in parish ministry.² Then philosophy might be viewed as an aid in parish education,³ preaching,⁴ counseling,⁵ and in Christian service, meaning, discipleship, and understanding.⁶ Such aid would even enrich parish pastors and their ministry.⁷

While hope for enrichment may be appropriate, is it equally in order to expect aid from *philosophy* for this? Should parish ministry be philosophical? Should parish pastors be philosophers? It seems suspect to offer a philosophical argument for philosophy's usefulness in parish ministry. So we can do something else instead. That is to follow a lead in Wittgenstein's writings and assemble an "al-

¹Apparently at one time it was clear. See Roland M. Kawano, "A Model for Learned Pastors," *Christian Century* 97 (January 23, 1980) 70-75.

²The classic reference here is probably Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I/1 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936): "Up to date, in practice in each of the three departments of theological inquiry—philosophy, science of history, psychology, etc., have in a direct sense succeeded only in increasing the self-alienation of the Church, in degenerating and devastating her language about God" (p. 5). And yet in September, 1953, Barth could also say, "As Christians we must have the freedom to let the most varied ways of thinking run through our heads....I myself have a certain weakness for Hegel and am always fond of doing a bit of 'Hegeling.' As Christians we have the freedom to do this....I do it eclectically" (Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976] 387). For an effort to combine this "freedom" and "devastation," see James Kincade, "Karl Barth and Philosophy," *Journal of Religion* 40 (1960) 161-169.

³See *Thinking: The Journal of Philosophy for Children* published at Montclair State College, Upper Montclair, New Jersey 07043.

⁴See Richard John Neuhaus, *Freedom for Ministry* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979) 158, as well as Ian Hacking, *Why Does Language Matter to Philosophy?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1975).

⁵See John B. Cobb, *Theology and Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977) 52, as well as David Griffin, "Philosophical Theology and the Pastoral Ministry," *Encounter* 33 (1972) 230-244.

⁶See Paul Sponheim, *Faith and Process* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1979) 26, 32, 42, 46, 231.

⁷Perhaps by forming an identity. See Søren Kierkegaard's *Journals and Papers*, ed. H. V. Hong and E. H. Hong (7 vols.; Bloomington: Indiana University, 1967-78) 3.446 (section 3157), "Being a pastor has practically become a charade, and no one can definitely say what it is; it is an indefinable something...a *neutrius generis* (neither ecclesiastical nor secular) or *generis utriusque*, an ecclesiastical-secular hermaphrodite."

bum...of pictures of the landscape."⁸ This bibliographical survey, then, will collect pieces and pictures of what some major contemporary philosophers have been saying about God.⁹ And if the collection is found to be useful in parish ministry, then it will be clearer what philosophy's

purpose is for parish pastors.

PRELIMINARIES

Before we start browsing through this album's pictures, however, there are three other things to be said. First, what is this thing called *philosophy* from which we are to gain assistance? A brief reading of Bontempo and Odell's (eds.) *The Owl of Minerva: Philosophers on Philosophy* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975) would suggest that philosophy's identity is quite slippery. It has been many things to many people for many years. Two recent statements have focussed philosophy in helpful ways. First there is Richard Rorty's much discussed new book, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1979). For Rorty philosophy is not a means for establishing the truth about the world, but rather an activity which "edifies" the user by supplying new ways of speaking about the themes of our culture. That is a provoking and unconventional view, but Rorty makes it convincingly. And secondly there is Gareth Matthews's delightful and important book, *Philosophy and the Young Child* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1980). If nothing else, this book will give a new angle on Mark 10:13-16 and God's preference for children. But it also demonstrates that philosophy is what protects our natural naiveté about life through honoring mental puzzles which nurture our amazement and wonder about the simplest of things. To put Rorty and Matthews together: *philosophy* produces edifying mental puzzles.

And secondly, the album offered here is not the only one around. For a far richer view of the same landscape of what contemporary philosophy is saying about God, one does well to turn to William Wainwright's massive and indispensable resource, *Philosophy of Religion: An Annotated Bibliography of Twentieth-Century Writing in English* (New York: Garland, 1978). If a helpful review of that book were in my power, this survey would have been just that. Yet the survey offered here extends beyond his range of topics. Wainwright's book divides the literature into eight conventional categories. My thirteen categories clearly share only five of Wainwright's. My judgment is that Wainwright's work should be seen as a balance for my more maverick album.

And finally there are the covers of my album. On the front cover there are these words which A. J. Ayer wrote in 1946:

The theist, like the moralist, may believe that his experiences are cognitive experiences, but, unless he can formulate his 'knowledge' in propositions that are empirically verifiable, we may be sure that he is deceiving himself. It follows that those philosophers who fill their books with assertions that they intuitively 'know' this or that moral or religious 'truth' are merely providing material for the psycho-analyst.¹⁰

⁸Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (3rd ed.; New York: Macmillan, 1958) ix.

⁹Regrettably this approach will not meet the need for "more rigorous analysis" in religious issues, as requested by Lee H. Yearly. See his review of Neville's *Soldier, Saint, and Sage*, in *Journal of Religion* 61 (1981) 223-225.

¹⁰A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic* (New York: Dover, 1946) 120.

And on the back there are the words of Mortimer J. Adler in 1980:

The philosopher can do little more than that. He can build a bridge to the other side of the chasm by attempting to show—by reason and reason alone—the affinity that exists between the God of the philosophers and the God of the faithful, as objects of thought. That he can do, but no more, and that still remains insufficient for religious belief and worship....Reason can build a bridge, but it cannot carry anyone across to the other side. Pascal's leap of faith across an unbridged chasm may not be necessary, but the encouragement and attraction of faith are needed to motivate using the bridge to make the crossing.¹¹

These covers tell a story about philosophy and Christianity. In 1946 it was more clear than it might have been in 1980 that philosophy is mostly the adversary of Christianity. Now it is more likely that philosophy may be an aid to Christianity.

PICTURES

Here are thirteen features of God that have attracted contemporary philosophers. I have selected them either because the philosopher is important or because the topic addressed is obviously of interest to parish life (or both).

1. Nature and Definition of God.

Philosophical options for the nature and definition of God have been presented well in Charles Hartshorne and William L. Reese's (eds.) book, *Philosophers Speak of God* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1953), Frederick Sontag's book, *Divine Perfection: Possible Ideas of God* (New York: Harper, 1962), and in H. P. Owen's book, *Concepts of Deity* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1971). Some, such as Frederick Sontag in his book, *What Can God Do?* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), have concluded that God's nature "contains diversity" (p. 125) and at its "core" is "irreducible multiplicity" (p. 127).

Others, however, have sought further specification. Charles Hartshorne, in his classic *The Divine Relativity: A Social Conception of God* (New Haven: Yale University, 1948), argued that God's nature has "two aspects." God is both exclusive and inclusive, active and passive (pp. 15, 70, 87, 90). And this is based on the logic of worship: God must be both worshipful and worshipable (p. 52).¹² Much of Hartshorne's thought depends on the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead. Others discussing this matter have used Whitehead's philosophy to distinguish between metaphysical ultimacy and religious ultimacy, claiming that God is what is religiously ultimate (the basis of goodness) and not what is metaphysically ultimate (the basis of reality). This distinction has been challenged by Laurence F. Wilmot in his book, *Whitehead and God* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University, 1979), and by Robert C. Neville in his book, *Creativity and God* (New York: Seabury, 1980).¹³ Both Wilmot and Neville argue that the logic of God requires only one ultimate (monism), rather than two (dualism).

¹¹Mortimer J. Adler, *How to Think About God* (New York: MacMillan, 1980) 155, 158.

¹²I have elaborated this distinction in my "God and Worship," *dialog* 14 (1975) 134-143.

¹³See the highly creative and sympathetic critique by Lewis S. Ford of Neville's argument in *Process Studies* 10 (1980) 105-109.

Aquinas' philosophy has inspired two further studies on this matter of God's nature: David B. Burrell's *Aquinas: God and Action* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1979) and Alvin Plantinga's *Does God Have a Nature?* (Milwaukee: Marquette University, 1980). Burrell argues that God's nature is "to-be" (p. 24) which is "to act" (p. 139). And that definition shows both how discourse is related to the world (p. 53) and how the world is both derivative and related (p. 140). Plantinga investigates in his book the relationship between God and "abstract objects," concluding that "exploring the realm of abstract objects can be seen as exploring the nature of God. Mathematics thus takes its proper place as one of the *loci* of theology" (p. 144). And yet it would be an "utter mistake" to suppose that God is a "mere abstract object" (pp. 47, 53). Instead God "affirms" abstract objects thus making them "part of his nature" (p. 142).

Wittgenstein's philosophy inspired Alan Keightley's *Wittgenstein, Grammar and God* (London: Epworth, 1976). Keightley concludes with this question, "What exactly is *reduced* or *lost* by ceasing to connect religious language to something external?" (p. 159). Keightley thinks very little is lost, for "God" is "not a *name* of someone or something" but instead a "word" for "the complex patterns of religious reactions to the contingency of the world" (p. 82).

These then are the six pictures which are given: God's nature as multiple, as dual, as single, as a manner of relatedness, as affirming abstract objects, and as non-external.

2. Language and Meaning

Philosophical options for the meaningfulness of speech about God have been presented well in Flew and MacIntyre's (eds.) classic book, *New Essays in Philosophical Theology* (New York: MacMillan, 1955), and in Stuart C. Brown's (ed.) book, *Reason and Religion* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1977). The challenge to the meaningfulness of speech about God is quite manifold; yet it seems to hinge on two claims: (1) that speech about God is incoherent within itself; and (2) that speech about God eludes incompatibility with any state of affairs. The most massive attack on this challenge came in Raeburne S. Heimbeck's book, *Theology and Meaning* (Stanford: Stanford University, 1969), where he argued that the "sceptic's case is predicated upon the checkability theory of meaning" which collapses because of its "confusion between verification and entailment, between falsification and incompatibility, in short, between evidence and criteria of meaning" (pp. 36-37). For Heimbeck, then, this challenge confused "implausibility with unintelligibility" (p. 9).

But Heimbeck's attack has not settled the debate. Michael Durrant, in his book, *The Logical Status of 'God'* (London: St. Martins, 1973), argued that the term "God" has no meaningful use because due to its mixed uses as a proper name, abstract term, descriptive predicable, and general term it "exhibits radically incompatible logics" (p. 79). And in his book, *Theology and Intelligibility* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), he argued that Aquinas' thesis that God is the end or goal of human life "cannot be sensibly spoken of" (p. 40), and that Augustine's thesis that God is a Trinity is "unintelligible" (p. 196).

Furthermore, in Kai Nielsen's book, *Contemporary Critiques of Religion* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1971), it was argued that the "Christian concept of God is an incoherent concept" because when it is used to state, e.g., that "God loves people," it lacks the necessary "behavioural background" to make it intelligible

(pp. 127-128). And also in his book, *Scepticism* (London: St. Martins, 1973), he argued that regarding religious utterances, “the language is familiar but ‘the truth’ is not” (p. 99) because the “conditions” for their truth remain “anomalous.”

Three notable responses have been made to these further charges. Using Whitehead’s philosophy, Lyman T. Lundeen has written in his book, *Risk and Rhetoric in Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972), that “an inclusive referential theory of meaning is possible which will maintain continuity between assertions of religion and the more obviously empirical statements of science and common sense” (p. 186). Using Wittgenstein’s philosophy, Garth L. Hallett has constructed in his book, *Darkness and Light* (New York: Paulist, 1975), a “method of ordered models” or of “perspicuous representation by means of intermediate cases” (p. 18) to aid those who “puzzle over the meaning” of doctrinal statements (p. 149). And in Richard Swinburne’s book, *The Coherence of Theism* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1977), he has argued that meaningful speech about God may be built upon a combination of “ordinary mundane senses” and “extended analogical senses” of words through both the following of, and the “loosening up” of, “standard semantic and syntactic rules” (p. 70).

These then are the pictures: Speech about God is *meaningful* without checkability; or, on the other hand, it is *meaningless* due to incompatible logics, the absence of a behavioral background, or because of anomalous truth conditions; or, again, it is *meaningful* because of an inclusive referential system, meaningful by way of the method of ordered models, and meaningful due to a combination of following and loosening standard semantic and syntactic rules.

3. Existence and Necessity

Philosophers have exhibited no greater attraction to the question of God than through their analyses of the *existence* of God. These analyses are among the most complex in the history of philosophy. They involve issues of (1) proof, (2) necessary existence, (3) logic and argument, (4) evidence and inference, (5) sufficient reason, and (6) explanation.

Notable philosophical surveys of this issue are: John Hick, (ed.) *The Existence of God* (New York: MacMillan, 1964), D. R. Burrill (ed.), *The Cosmological Argument* (New York: Doubleday, 1967), Alvin Plantinga (ed.), *The Ontological Argument* (London: MacMillan, 1968), and John Hick and A. C. McGill (eds.), *The Many-Faced Argument* (New York: MacMillan, 1968). Helpful introductions are: John Hick, *Arguments for the Existence of God* (New York: Seabury, 1971) and Charles Hartshorne, “Six Theistic Proofs” in his *Creative Synthesis and Philosophic Method* (Lasalle: Open Court, 1970). Also there is the popular treatment, “Modernizing the Case for God,” *Time Magazine* 115 (April 7, 1980) 65-66, 68.

Three recent studies argue that all of the alleged proofs fail. A. G. N. Flew in his books, *God and Philosophy* (London: Hutchinson, 1966) and *The Presumption of Atheism and Other Essays* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1976), argues that there still is no evidence to support the claims of the proofs. And Wallace I. Matson’s book, *The Existence of God* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1965), wryly argues that even if the proofs did work (which he argues against), all that they would accomplish is idolatry, by actualizing an ideal (pp. 248-249).

There are also three unusual studies. Alvin Plantinga’s book, *God and Other Minds* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1967), argues that the traditional proofs fail and that an

“analogical argument” is needed (pp. 187, 245, 268), which enables him to conclude: “If my belief in other minds is rational, so is my belief in God. But obviously the former is rational; so, therefore, is the latter” (p. 271). Frederick Sontag’s book, *The God of Evil: An Argument from the Existence of the Devil* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), argues that God’s existence can more clearly be shown from the experiences of evil and the reality of the Devil (pp. 2-4), which enables him to conclude: “If you begin negatively, you do not find as a result one and only one concept of God, but at least you do meet a God who is likely to be able to encounter and withstand the strong forces of evil present in the hour” (p. 166). And Richard Campbell’s book, *From Belief to Understanding* (Canberra: Australian National University, 1976), argues that Anselm’s alleged “ontological” argument is actually not an analysis of a concept or an existential claim (pp. 3, 133, 182), but rather a piece of “mystical theology,” due to its reliance on “experience” and “address” (pp. 173-174). Campbell’s argument is opposite such studies as Charles Hartshorne’s book, *Anselm’s Discovery* (LaSalle: Open Court, 1965), which argues that the point of this proof is that at least “one existential question is logical, not empirical” (p. 6).

Here are six other notable studies. In Anthony Kenny’s book, *The Five Ways* (New York: Schocken, 1969), it is argued that all of Aquinas’ proofs fail because of their association with “medieval cosmology” (p. 3). James F. Ross’s book, *Philosophical Theology* (2nd ed.; Indianapolis: Hackett, 1980), provides a new twist with his “principle of explicability” (p. 124) which shows that the phrase “God exists” is “a priori and true” (pp. 133, 138). His Preface to the second edition (pp. ix-xxxviii) provides a fascinating guide to recent philosophy of religion. Basil Mitchell’s book, *The Justification of Religious Belief* (New York: Seabury, 1973), provides another new twist by arguing that a theistic proof can only be built on an “entire system of thought” rather than on single arguments (p. 156). Richard Swinburne’s book, *The Existence of God* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1979), elaborates Mitchell’s point (p. 13) through the use of “inductive logic” based on “confirmation theory” (p. 2). This enables him to pursue an “explanation” instead of a deductive proof (p. 19), and to conclude that theism is the “most probable” explanation of a set of puzzles about the world (p. 287), while still holding that “unanswered questions” remain (p. 290). William L. Rowe’s book *The Cosmological Argument* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1975), explores Samuel Clarke’s version of this argument, analyzing the use of the Principle of Sufficient Reason in it, and concluding that while it does not prove theism to be “true,” it does show that theistic belief is “reasonable” (p. 269). And in Alvin Plantinga’s book, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1974), God as a “necessary being” is explored through the ontological argument and “possible world” analysis, with the conclusion that it is “rational” to accept the central premise and so too the conclusion of the argument, without holding that the conclusion is thereby “proven to be true” (p. 221). Plantinga’s point hinges on the view that the properties of a necessary being “do not vary from world to world” (p. 216).

These then are ten pictures on God’s existence: God’s existence is without evidence; it would amount to idolatry if proven; it is analogous to the existence of other minds; it is supported by the reality of the Devil; it is a piece of mystical theology; proofs for God’s existence are contaminated by medieval cosmology; his existence can be asserted a priori by the principle of explicability; it can be as-

serted as probable, given puzzles about the world; it is reasonable, while not proven; and it is reasonably necessary, based on possible worlds analysis.

4. Time and Eternity

Background material for this issue is provided in Richard M. Gale (ed.), *The Philosophy of Time* (London: MacMillan, 1968) and Richard M. Gale, *The Language of Time* (New York: Humanities, 1968). There are three important studies. In Nelson Pike's book, *God and Timelessness* (New York: Schocken, 1970), he argues that eternity construed as timelessness or being out of time does not fit as well with the classic attributes of God as does eternity construed as everlasting or unending duration (p. 187), even though eternity as timelessness has been the dominant view—probably for reasons of “platonic stylishness” (p. 189). Nicholas Wolterstorff in his article, “God Everlasting” in *God and the Good* (ed. C. Orlebeke and L. Smedes [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975] 181-203), argues that God is not only not timeless, but also that God's “life and existence is itself temporal” (p. 202), and that this view is “presupposed” by the doctrine of redemption (p. 203). God, however, is also everlasting in the sense of being “without beginning and end” (p. 202). And in an article by Lewis S. Ford, “The Non-Temporality of Whitehead's God,” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 13 (1973) 347-376, the issue of God and Time is further elaborated. On this view God is “temporal” because temporal things are “absorbed” into God (p. 349); God is “everlasting” because God endures through time (p. 357); God is “atemporal” because God “issues forth” such atemporalities as “colors” (p. 359); God is “eternal” because God's entire life is a single everlasting present “moment” (p. 357); and God is “nontemporal” because the internal act that produces the atemporalities is independent of temporal passage (p. 357).

These then are the pictures: God as everlasting, as everlasting and temporal, as temporal, everlasting, atemporal, eternal and nontemporal.

5. Evil, Power, and Freedom

Next to the question of God's existence, God's relation to evil has gained the most attention from philosophers. Philosophical options on this issue have been presented in Nelson Pike (ed.), *God and Evil* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1964), in which the consequences are explored of claiming that God and evil are logically incompatible; and in L. Urban and D. Walton (eds.), *The Power of God* (New York: Oxford University, 1978), in which it is explored how the issue is affected by alternative views of divine omnipotence.

Here are nine notable studies. Austin Farrer in his book, *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* (London: Collins, 1962), argues that evil is necessary, for it makes creation “genuinely distinct” from a good Creator (p. 122). John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (2nd ed., New York: Harper & Row, 1978), argues for the “soul-making” theodicy of Irenaeus, which states that evil is necessary for human development (p. 253). E. H. Madden and P. H. Hare argue in their book, *Evil and the Concept of God* (Springfield: Thomas, 1968), that the reality of evil remains as evidence against the morality and existence of God (p. 34). In Frederick Sontag's book, *God, Why Did You Do That?* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), it is claimed that evil is the result of God's justifiable “excessive” freedom (p. 130) which remains a “mystery” (p. 165). Alvin Plantinga in his *God, Freedom and Evil* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974) argues for a “free will

that evil is allowable because its conditions also undergird desirable freedom (p. 29). David R. Griffin in his book, *God, Power and Evil* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), argues for a “process” theodicy, which states that God is not fully responsible for evil, because God is not omnipotent as traditionally construed (p. 310). In Errol E. Harris’s book, *The Problem of Evil* (Milwaukee: Marquette University, 1977), evil is considered necessary for the “differentiation” of the world, which leads to the possible perfection of the world (pp. 42,48). In P. T. Geach’s book, *Providence and Evil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1977), the argument is set forth that God is “almighty” (power over all things) and not “omnipotent” (power to do everything); and therefore God is not responsible for evil (pp. 3, 39). And Robert Young in his book, *Freedom, Responsibility and God* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1975), argues for a “compatibilist” theodicy which states that God’s omnipotence and human freedom are compatible, thereby exonerating God from total responsibility for evil (pp. 16, 222).

These then are nine pictures concerning God’s relation to evil: evil assures the Creator’s distinction from creation; evil is necessary to promote human development; the fact of evil dissolves God’s goodness and existence; it illustrates God’s mysteriously excessive freedom; it is a precondition for human freedom; it illustrates God’s limited power; evil is necessary in order that the world may be perfected through a process of differentiation; it shows that while God is almighty, he is not omnipotent, nor fully responsible for it; and it demonstrates that though one can speak of divine omnipotence, human freedom is compatible with it and is responsible for evil.

6. Morality

Philosophical options on this issue are outlined and developed in Paul Helm’s (ed.) book, *Divine Commands and Morality* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1981). Three features of this issue are explored in Helm’s book: (1) Do God’s commands damage human autonomy? (2) Do God’s commands damage God’s sovereignty? (3) What makes God’s commands obligatory?

Regarding (1) the issue is: Is it enough to do what God commands because God commanded it, or must the person *also* decide by some prior principle that God’s command is good in order to preserve one’s moral integrity? Regarding (2) the issue is: Are the things God commands good *before* they are commanded; and if so, does that make God dependent on some independent system of value? And regarding (3) the issue is: Are God’s commands obligatory because of the functioning of “property rights” between the Creator and the creatures; and if so, does that function ever allow for moral defection from the Creator?

There is one other important study. Kai Nielsen in his book, *Ethics Without God* (Buffalo: Prometheus, 1973), argues that “a moral understanding must be logically prior to any religious assent” (p. 21); that morality cannot be “derived” from religion and the existence of God (p. 46); that a world without God “does not really matter” for morality (p. 64); and that “belief in God” commits one to a “moral absolutism” that jeopardizes human responsibility (pp. 67, 84).

These then are the pictures concerning God’s relation to morality: God is its establisher; God is not its establisher; to posit a relationship could jeopardize God’s sovereignty; morality is obligatory apart from religious assent; and moral absolutism based on belief in God jeopardizes human responsibility.

7. Belief and Knowledge

There are five notable studies on this issue of God and Belief. Paul Helm in his *The Varieties of Belief* (New York: Humanities, 1973) argues that any analysis of belief in God must recognize that belief is multiple, including at least these alternatives: (1) belief as empirical probability judgment, (2) belief as self-authenticating certainty, (3) belief as a regulative, moral principle, and (4) belief as immediate personal awareness or acquaintance (p. 167). In Terence Penelhum's book, *Problems of Religious Knowledge* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1972), it is claimed that faith and knowledge are "not exclusive" (p. 143), and that even though it is difficult to support the knowledge claims of faith, they nonetheless should be strengthened (pp. 147-148). George I. Mavrodes in his book, *Belief in God* (New York: Random House, 1970), argues that the "epistemic complex" of religious faith requires attention not only to the activity of the believer but also to that of the substance of the belief (p. 112), and from this "double orientation" it will follow that the activity is "parasitic" on the substance and that the analysis of the activity is "secondary" to the activity "engaged" (p. 114). Using Polanyi's philosophy, Jerry H. Gill argues in his book, *The Possibility of Religious Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), that faith has "tacit knowledge" through a "dimensional-contextual awareness and personal functional response" (p. 163) which then makes faith's knowledge of God as reasonable as any person's knowledge of the self (p. 223). And in John Hick's book, *Faith and Knowledge* (2nd ed.; Ithaca: Cornell University, 1966), it is not only argued that faith is both "propositional" (p. 26) and "interpretive" (p. 101), but also that faith's cognitive content admits to what Hick calls an "eschatological verification" (p. 199).

These then are the pictures: the relationship of knowledge to belief in God is multiple; it is important, but lacking support; belief as activity must be analyzed apart from its subject matter; faith has "tacit knowledge" which is parallel to and as reasonable as self-knowledge; and faith's content is subject to eschatological verification.

8. Mysticism

There are two notable studies regarding this issue: Howard Coward and Terence Penelhum's (eds.), *Mystics and Scholars* (Waterloo: Canadian Corporation for Studies in Religion Reprint, 1977), and Steven T. Katz's (ed.), *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis* (New York: Oxford University, 1978). In the Coward-Penelhum book four issues receive recurring attention: (1) Does belief in God have primarily an explanatory or an experiential function? (2) Are experiences ever legitimate grounds for holding a religious position? (3) Can mystical experiences be deemed rational if they are incompatible with the wider, common, experiential context? and (4) Is it possible to have mystical experiences which achieve perfect unification with God and dissolve the subject-object distinction? Regarding this last issue it was argued that such unification is unlikely, at least, this side of the grave (p. 84). And in the Katz book two broad issues receive the most attention: (1) Is a wider view of meaning justifiable and useable when analyzing mystical experiences? and (2) Is a wider view of verification justifiable and useable when analyzing mystical experiences?

These then are the pictures, and they are picture puzzles: Are mystical expe-

riences grounds for belief? Are they irrational if incompatible with wider experiential context? Are they truly capable of dissolving the subject-object distinction? Are they cause for wider canons of meaning and verification?

9. Forgiveness

Four articles comprise the notable studies on this issue: J. Gingell, "Forgiveness and Power," *Analysis* 34 (1974) 180-183; A. C. Minas, "God and Forgiveness," *Philosophical Quarterly* 25 (1975) 138-150; M. Hughes, "Forgiveness," *Analysis* 35 (1975) 113-117; and A. D. Jensen, "Dr. Johnson, Kierkegaard, and Gingell's Dilemma," *Sophia* 15 (1976) 7-12. Minas argues that divine forgiveness is incoherent because (1) there would be no reason for a perfect moral being to retract a perfect moral judgment (p. 139); (2) God would not be using some inadequate moral standard which would require mitigation to ensure just evaluations (p. 140); (3) it would require God to overlook or condone an offense, something which an omniscient being could never do, and which a perfectly moral being should never do anyway (pp. 140-141); (4) it would require that God remit what was originally assigned by God, thereby resulting in the destruction of divine simplicity by having divine remission divided against divine assignments (p. 141), and because God's perfect justice would block remitting what was deserved (p. 142); and (5) God would have no reason to change the divine attitude, since nothing could do personal harm to a perfect being, and so God could just as well harbor resentment as not, since it would have no injurious effect on God (p. 147).

Gingell argues that universal divine forgiveness is impossible because of a version of the dilemma in the classic Euthyphro argument (p. 182): If only God can forgive sins, then either (1) what is forgiven is arbitrary, and human forgiveness is trivialized; or (2) God's forgiveness is secondary and so no longer universal (p. 183). In reply to Gingell, Hughes argues that the dilemma based on the Euthyphro argument is only actually a doubleness of real and ideal forgiveness (p. 115), and that the function of ideal forgiveness is not to coopt human forgiveness, but to encourage it (p. 114). And Jensen's response to Gingell is that God's forgiveness is universal by being the "source" of all other non-divine acts of forgiveness, and thereby need not be viewed as coopting human forgiveness (p. 9).

These then are the pictures: God's forgiveness is incoherent, given his nature; it is impossible on a universal scale, if it is appealed to in order to acquit oneself from forgiving; God's forgiveness is the ideal which encourages human forgiveness; and God's forgiveness is the source of all human forgiveness.

10. Miracles and Action

Philosophers have been examining critiques of miracles since David Hume's celebrated critical essay of 1748. Recently the examination has centered around Richard Swinburne's book, *The Concept of Miracle* (London: St. Martin's, 1970), with his focus on divine miraculous *action*. Swinburne argues that if a miracle is a violation of a law of nature, then it can be given a "personal explanation" (p. 53) which attributes the miracle to the deed of an agent (God), and thereby avoids the problem of accounting for such a violation scientifically. He also argues that even though the divine agent does not have a body, God's actions remain close enough to human actions that it remains intelligible to attribute miracles to the agency of God (p. 57).

But in George D. Chryssides' article, "Miracles and Agents," *Religious Studies* 11 (1975) 319-327, it is argued that scientific and personal explanations cannot be kept apart so neatly, for what a "believer in miracles" is saying is that miracles are "both caused and uncaused," both personally explainable and scientifically inexplicable, and that is "self contradictory" (p. 327). And Charles B. Fethe in his article, "Miracles and Action Explanations," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 36 (1976) 415-422, argues that the distinction between personal explanations and scientific explanations breaks down because a notion of causality is at work in both, and so the only way out for an argument like Swinburne's is to construct a "new interpretation of causality," which no one to date has succeeded in doing (p. 421), and so the criticisms of attributing miracles to divine agency remain (p. 415). However, in an essay by Herbert Burhenn, "Attributing Miracles to Agents," *Religious Studies* 13 (1977) 485-489, it is held that "despite the fact that we think of miracles as events caused by divine or diabolical agents, considerations about attribution are teleological rather than causal in character" (p. 489).

These then are the pictures: God's miraculous agency is intelligible by personal explanation; it is self-contradictory; it is inconsistent with causality; and it is teleologically intelligible.

11. Prayer

Philosophers have addressed themselves to this issue chiefly in cases of *petitionary* prayer. In Eleonore Stump's article, "Petitionary Prayer," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 16 (1979) 81-91, this form of prayer is said to be "inconsistent" with the goodness of God, because such prayer assumes that God is not already at work bringing about the best good for every situation (pp. 85, 83). Her "workable solution" is to justify prayer as a "buffer" between God and people in order to sustain a mature relation of "friendship" (p. 90). Robert Young in his article, "Petitioning God," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 11 (1974) 193-201, argues that such prayer is justifiable not only for its potential in "lifting depression" (p. 198), but also as a means of providing a reason for God to act, even though God should have such reason prior to the petition (p. 199). Another sort of justification is provided in Peter Geach's chapter, "Praying for Things to Happen" in his book, *God and the Soul* (New York: Schocken, 1969), where he argues that such prayers only influence divine action without determining it (pp. 87-89). In Lewis S. Ford's essay, "Our Prayers as God's Passions" in H. J. Cargas and B. Lee's (eds.) *Religious Experience and Process Theology* (New York: Paulist, 1976), it is argued, using Whitehead's philosophy, that such prayers constitute God's "passion" (pp. 435-436) by endowing God with "multidimensionality" (p. 436). An altogether different view is presented in D. Z. Phillips' book, *The Concept of Prayer* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965), where he argues that it is "superstitious" to suppose that such prayers "influence" God (p. 120), instead of viewing them as people's "devotion to God through the way things go" (pp. 120-121).

These then are the pictures: Petitionary prayers are related to God as being inconsistent with divine goodness; they serve as a buffer for friendly relations between God and people; they provide reasons already held for divine action; they are nondetermining influences; they are human expressions of God's passions; and they are noninfluencing acts of human devotion to God.

12. World Religions

The issue here is how the God of the Christian Faith relates to the other religions of the world. There is one notable philosophical treatment of this issue that is being discussed: John Hick's book, *God and the Universe of Faiths* (London: MacMillan, 1977). Hick argues that a "Copernican revolution in theology" is needed which will "involve a shift from the dogma that Christianity is at the centre, to the realization that it is *God* who is at the center, and that all the religions of mankind, including our own, serve and revolve around him" (p. 131). And secondly, this revolution becomes possible for Christianity when the doctrine of the Incarnation is construed as a true myth rather than as an exclusive hypothesis (p. 179).

Here the picture is: God is related to world religions as their center.

13. Eschatology

Background material for this issue is presented well in Anthony Flew's (ed.), *Body, Mind, and Death* (New York: MacMillan, 1964). The issue here is God's relation to death and the end of the world. In George B. Wall's article, "Heaven and a Wholly Good God," *Personalist* 58 (1977) 352-357, it is argued that if suffering is absent from heaven, then either (1) heaven is amoral, because without suffering there also will be no freedom, and so it is not clear how it is the place of perfection; or (2) God is immoral due to allowing the needless suffering on earth (pp. 353-355). And in Marilyn McCord Adams' article, "Hell and the God of Justice," *Religious Studies* 11 (1975) 443-447, it is asserted that the "doctrine of hell is in need of repair" because there is no "sound principle about what people deserve," which is needed if this doctrine is to follow from "God's perfect justice" (p. 446). In Terence Penelhum's book, *Survival and Disembodied Existence* (New York: Humanities, 1970), post-mortem, disembodied personal existence is said to be unintelligible, because grounds for personal identity are lacking (p. 102), and an incorporeal God has the same problem (p. 108). Perhaps the most detailed recent philosophical study on these issues is John Hick's book *Death and Eternal Life* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976). There he argues that the doctrine of hell as eternal punishment is unacceptable because (1) it is incompatible with divine love; (2) the absolute contrast of heaven and hell is unrelated to the known vast gradations of good and evil; (3) it lacks any reformative purpose; and (4) it destroys any coherent theodicy through the "eternal lodgment" of evil in God (p. 201). He also argues that heaven will include people from all of the world's religions, as people exist in a "complete collective consciousness of humanity" (p. 461), where there will be "no further embodiment" but rather "entry into the common Vision of God," without "the collective human self being ultimately identical with God" (p. 464).

These then are the pictures concerning God's relation to the end of the world: An afterlife without suffering for the wicked would imply that God is amoral or immoral; an afterlife with retribution is inconsistent with perfect justice; a disembodied existence would be unintelligible due to there being no grounds for personal identity; and an afterlife for humanity must be without eternal damnation and embodiment.

POSTSCRIPT

These then are the over sixty pictures in my album. Now what purpose do they serve for the parish pastor? What is philosophy's purpose for parish pastors? Af-

ter looking through my album it may be concluded that because the pictures were so confusing, it would be better to forget about contemporary philosophy, and say instead:

No wonder...that ministers often find [philosophy] to be something they can do without....By getting enough Bible to get by, some knowledge of people, and a generous dose of “knack,” it looks suspiciously as if one can be a preacher *sans* all [philosophy].¹⁴

Perhaps, then, my album has shown that philosophy has no purpose for parish pastors because it does not seem “to foster...the speaking of the short word in preaching.”¹⁵ I would disagree with this conclusion for two reasons.

First of all, philosophy helps pastors keep the range of their religious interests *broad*. This does not mean that philosophy thereby provides “foundations” for the faith so that it no longer is “hard to believe.”¹⁶ Instead it means that philosophy helps pastors overcome the narrowness of uncritical parochialism. And this it does by providing what I have called “edifying mental puzzles.”¹⁷

Secondly, philosophy helps pastors nurture spiritual *depth*. It has been said that “in the Church we always live beyond our spiritual depth.”¹⁸ Although that may not be always *factually* true about the church, it does seem to be true about the church’s *purpose*. The church seeks spiritual depth, rather than mediocrity. Philosophy’s purpose, then, is to help pastors overcome shallowness.

The most remarkable thing about the pictures in my album is the breadth and depth of contemporary philosophers’ *concern* with the question of God (see Eph. 3:18). And that breadth and depth is based in honest inquiry:

An honest religious thinker is like a tightrope walker. He almost looks as though he were walking on nothing but air. His support is the slenderest imaginable. And yet it really is possible to walk on it.¹⁹

There is a thinness that comes with breadth, and a darkness that comes with depth, that causes many to prefer narrowness and shallowness. Honesty, however, requires that we learn to become “tightrope walkers,” even though the rope is thin and the room is dark. And because philosophy seeks to make tightrope walkers out of pastors, its purpose is clear, useful, and good. So it would be wrong to suppose that such tightrope walking abandons or destroys the faith. Instead what it does is show in what ways the Rock of our lives is like a Rope (see Matthew 7:24-27).

¹⁴Paul L. Holmer, *The Grammar of Faith* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978) 2-3, with the word “philosophy” replacing his word “theology.”

¹⁵Gerhard O. Forde, “A Short Word,” *dialog* 20 (1981) 88-92, 90.

¹⁶Paul L. Holmer, *The Grammar of Faith*, 81.

¹⁷In this regard, see Vincent G. Potter, “The Irrelevance of Philosophy,” *Thought* 49 (1974) 145-155: “Philosophy’s relevance is its very irrelevance—its power is its impotence to confront head-on the concrete, for it

allows us to step back and look at the situation in a detached way which leaves us open to inquiry, to new ideas, to radical changes of viewpoint. Philosophy must be irrelevant in the sense of impractical in the short run in order that it may reverse the implications of narrow practicalism in the long run” (p. 155).

¹⁸Daniel Day Williams, *The Minister and the Care of Souls* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961) 146.

¹⁹Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1980) 73.