

REDUCTIONISM AND RELIGIOUS TRUTH CLAIMS

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I

A knight of faith might well argue that there is no way of deciding whether 'There is a God' or 'There is no God' is true. We do not know which of these statements is true or even more likely to be true. But a knight of faith will take the plunge and accept the former *de fide*. In confessing his belief in God, he gives us to understand that he believes that there is a God. This belief, he maintains, has a straightforwardly factual status. He need not fall back on a Wittgensteinian Fideist *sui generis* defense, for (to make his case first by indirection), there is also no way of deciding between (A) 'Every event has some cause or other' and (B) 'Most events, and perhaps all events, have causes.' Yet, he could say that both (A) and (B) have factual significance and thus, by parity of argument, certain empirically specifiable states of affairs should be said to count for or against 'There is a God.' It is just that here the evidence is so indecisive that we do not even know which belief is the more probable. Man's feelings of insufficiency, inadequacy and dependence count for the truth of 'There is a God.' Human and animal suffering and man's capacity to overcome estrangement without a religious orientation count against it. And nothing does or even could count conclusively or decisively for it or against it. But given what has been said about statements with mixed quantifiers and about (A) and (B) above, a lack of such decisive confirmation or disconfirmation cannot by itself deprive religious utterances of factual significance.

There is much to be said for this. It would be ridiculous to demand a more stringent criterion of factual significance for religious utterances than that demanded in other domains. However, there is this to be noted as well: (A) and (B) are not as radically in conflict as

'There is a God' and 'There is no God.' 'Only some events have causes' or 'No events have causes' is more radically in conflict with (A) than is (B). Yet we have empirical evidence that makes (A) far more probable than such radically conflicting claims. But what about 'There is a God' and its denial? They are radically in conflict, yet which is the more probable? We are at sea here. Centuries of religious and philosophical dispute has produced little substantial agreement concerning the existence of God. Yet, if the assertion and the denial of the existence of God are equally compatible with all statements recording what is even in principle experienceable, then how can either claim have factual significance when it is maintained, as believers must maintain, that the two statements make different assertions? It is indeed true that different claims can be compatible with the same evidence, but where not only the same evidence is in question but no *conceivable* experiential difference can distinguish one supposedly factual claim from the other, then it is utterly unclear how there could be more than a *verbal* difference between these supposedly different claims. We use phrases which lead us to expect that there is a difference but, as Peirce stressed, we cannot exhibit in terms of anything we can experience any real difference. It does not seem that in this event they could make different factual assertions. We are back to Mitchell and his alternative conceptual frameworks.¹

However, the believer need not take that route. He could be a fideist and believe 'There is a God' is highly improbable and that 'There is no God' is more likely to be true and still consistently maintain that 'There is a God' has factual significance. There is, such a fideist will claim, some empirical evidence that counts for its truth, e.g., man's feelings of dependence, and much evidence against it, but such utterances have factual content and he, as a knight of faith, accepts the highly improbable but still factually intelligible claim that God exists.

At such a stage in the argument talk about evidence for or against putative factual statements made by the use of such utterances is not in itself sufficient to resolve questions about their intelligibility.² In short, we must also look at the component words of the religious utterances themselves and in particular we must examine the word

¹Kai Nielsen, "Empiricism, Theoretical Constructs and God", *The Journal of Religion* (forthcoming).

²Kai Nielsen, "On Fixing the Reference Range of God," *Religious Studies*, Vol. I (1966).

'God.' Now, I would agree that the relational theory of meaning which often underlies the verifiability criterion is indeed mistaken.³ Certainly it is not the case that it is proper to ask for the denotation for all words. But in religious discourse 'God' is some kind of a referring expression; it is the kind of word — or so it seems at least — of which it is proper to ask for its denotation. That is to say, it is quite conceptionally in order to ask what the word 'God' stands for in a way it is not in order to ask what 'and' stands for. If no coherent account can be given of what it purportedly stands for, then God-talk is indeed incoherent.

Suppose A says he believes 'There is a God' is true because men have feelings of dependency and recognize their finitude. B acknowledges that he and others have a sense of finitude and dependency but he does not understand what this has to do with God. He still does not understand the use of that strange word 'God' — though he indeed *knows how* to use 'God' properly. His perplexity reaches a peak when A insists that it is not simply a shorthand expression for having feelings of finitude and dependency and the like. A tells B that God is a Being transcendent to the universe or — in case he was influenced by Tillich — that God, as the Unconditioned Transcendent, is the ground of the world. However, if B is troubled by 'God' he is going to be equally troubled by 'a Being Transcendent to the Universe' or 'Unconditioned Reality transcendent to the Universe.' These phrases are also putative referring expressions. They too purportedly stand for something, have a *referend* or *denotation*. But no coherent account of what they refer to can be given.

If in a desperate attempt to find an empirical anchorage for them we return to talking of feelings of dependency, finitude and the like, we are back to B's original bafflement. He understands what it is to talk of man's finitude and feelings of dependency but not of God or an Unconditioned Transcendent. He asks A for an account of such concepts but A cannot satisfy him. A admits that it does not follow from the fact that people feel dependent, feel their finitude, and indeed are finite creatures that there is a God or Unconditioned Transcendent. It begins to appear that 'God' and 'Unconditioned Transcendent' are just strange phrases that A uses in conjunction with talk of the very human experiences of contingency, finitude, estrangement and the like. He asserts that they also carry some added cognitive content of a very different kind, but he cannot explain

³J. L. Evans, "On Meaning and Verification," *Mind*, Vol. LXII, (January, 1953), pp. 1-19, and J. L. Evans, *The Foundations of Empiricism*, (Cardiff: University of Cardiff Press, 1965), pp. 4-20.

what this 'additional content' is. It certainly looks on any reasonable principle of simplicity that he is just adding phrases that do no real work. Worse still they seem to be 'empty phrases,' meaning by that phrases which purport to express a concept but fail. I say they purport to express a concept but fail because they are purportedly phrases which denote yet we have no understanding of what they allegedly denote.

Reflection on the word 'God' — in its non-anthropomorphic uses — and on the problematic conditions associated with the world 'God,' taken in conjunction with the recognition that to be factual religious utterances need to be confirmable or disconfirmable, brings out the radical incoherence of God-talk. The need for verification requires a specification of meaning in terms of experienceable states of affairs. But only if such a specification is carried out for central strands of God-talk, it is evident that such empirical specifications can be understood and accepted in complete independence of any understanding of the concept of God. That is to say, the man who can make nothing of God-talk can still perfectly well understand the empirical talk involved in the alleged empirical specification of meaning. Furthermore, even after understanding that empirical talk and its implications very well, he can still be utterly perplexed about the alleged connection with God or some Unconditional Transcendent. But without such a specification these key religious utterances are devoid of factual significance. And without such factual significance they lack the kind of meaning Jews, Christians and Moslems require of them. To give an account of this discourse, to make it plain not just *how* but *that* it is coherent, he must show how its key claims are verifiable. But in giving what the believer takes to be the empirical anchorage of his claims, he has not been able to show how he succeeds in making factual assertions which are incompatible with and 'go beyond' the assertions a secularist or religious sceptic could make. Yet, as a believer, he must say and indeed believe that he is asserting something substantial which is distinct from what an atheist or agnostic can assert. However, to do this, he must indicate what 'God' or 'a reality transcendent to the world' refers to (stands for, denotes) and it is just here at this absolutely crucial juncture where he fails.

II

Religious utterances like 'God loves us,' 'God has a plan for the universe,' 'God is the ground of our existence' and 'There is a God'

appear to be vast cosmological but still factual *assertions*. Indeed, they have been thought to assert that 'ultimate order of fact' which gives us the facts of faith on which our faith is grounded. Yet in their logical behavior they do not operate like factual assertions. If a person makes a factual assertion, there must be something that could count toward establishing the truth or the falsity of that assertion. But, as we have seen, where 'God' is construed non-anthropomorphically, there is no way of establishing the truth (or probable truth) or falsity (or probable falsity) of the alleged assertions. Sophisticated theists will not allow anything to so count against their fundamental religious claims such that if such a turn of events were to transpire they would give them up. But then their beliefs *about* their claims notwithstanding, they cannot justifiably maintain that such central theistic utterances are factual assertions, for if something is to count as a factual assertion at all, it must claim that things stand thus and thus and not otherwise. It has been the burden of my argument to establish — to put it now oversimply — that God-talk is not verifiable, i.e., key religious utterances do not actually function as factual statements and there is no possible way of coming to know whether they are true or false. If this is so, then the very concept of religious truth becomes an utterly empty notion and Judaism and Christianity have at their heart an incoherent idea: on the one hand, it is believed by believers that it is a fact that there is a God and that mankind are dependent on Him and, on the other hand, utterances which are supposedly expressive of that belief do not function as factual statements. They do not assert something which is true or false. There is in short a cleft between their beliefs *about* their discourse and their actual use of God-talk which renders their faith incoherent.

It will be thought in some quarters that in making this claim I have moved too rapidly for I have ignored the counters of philosophers who regard themselves as Christians or Jews but believe that such key religious utterances are not genuine factual utterances which are either true or false. They do not conclude from this, as I do, that Judaism and Christianity are really incoherent ideologies which should be discarded, but argue that it is no essential part of such religions to make grand cosmological claims that so and so is true in religion, i.e., that there is a Deity who created the heavens and the earth. For them 'religious truth,' unless it is a reified and misleading way of talking about being 'truly religious,' is an incoherent conception. Religious beliefs, they will grant, have the *prima facie* status of factual beliefs but actually the utterances

expressive of those beliefs do not function to give voice to factual statements, bits of descriptive discourse, which are true or false. In reality they have a radically different use. To contrast it with the mainline approach which maintains that these key religious utterances function descriptively and are either true or false, I shall call this approach — represented among philosophers by Hare, Braithwaite, Miles and Van Buren — the non-descriptive approach.⁴

For the non-descriptivists (sometimes dismissively called reductionists by their opponents) such religious utterances are taken as expressions of basic commitments or decisions which are associated with certain stories or parables which are entertained but need not be believed. As such, they can be neither true nor false and thus the notion of falsifiability cannot even arise. 'God' here is not a name or any kind of referring expression for some Super-Being or Being-as-such. It is not, non-descriptivists argue, the name of any kind of being at all; neither is it the name of some 'reality beyond any conceptions of genus and species.' 'God' is a word used to express what Kierkegaard somewhat misleadingly called 'subjective truth,' that is to say, it expresses that for which the speaker is willing to live and die.

This position has been effectively criticized as an interpretation of how reasonably orthodox believers use God-sentences. Taken in this non-descriptivist way the sentences cannot be used so as to make religious remarks that will be properly orthodox or practically effective. The argument against a non-descriptivist theory would go something like this. No reasonable man would deny that God-sentences have emotive, ceremonial, and performative functions or (to use another idiom) that they have distinctive illocutionary and perlocutionary forces. Religious utterances indeed express attitudes and evoke reactions and in or by uttering them one sometimes commits oneself to certain principles of action. But they are also — and essentially — *taken* by the faithful to be something more than expressions of intention associated with a parable or myth. Religious utterances *somehow* purport to make claims about the nature of the universe; they supposedly show its dependent status and indicate

⁴R. M. Hare, "Theology and Falsification," *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*; A. Flew and A. MacIntyre (eds.) (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1955), pp. 99-103; R. B. Braithwaite, "An Empiricist's View of the Nature of Religious Belief," in *Christian Ethics and Contemporary Philosophy*, Ian T. Ramsey (ed.) (London: SCM Press, 1966), pp. 53-73; T. R. Miles, *Religion and the Scientific Outlook*, (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1955); T. R. Miles, "On Excluding the Supernatural," *Religious Studies*, Vol. I, no. 2 (1966), pp. 141-151.

what 'end' it has. Religious utterances do not simply express and tend to evoke wonder and reverence at the very existence of the world (*that* the world is, not *how* it is). They indeed do that but they also purport to say something about the contingent and dependent status of the world as well. They purport to be locutionary acts with a constative force as well as illocutionary acts and perlocutionary acts with a commissive force. In the stream of religious life, it is taken as axiomatic that God-sentences are in some sense used to make statements or assertions that are said to be true or false and the word 'God' is some kind of a referring expression. To drop these notions is to alter radically the language-game, the form of life, and set of expectations that goes with being a Christian or Jew. The predications we make of 'God' may be in some complicated sense 'analogical,' and in saying 'There is an x such that x is God', we may not even be clear about how 'There is' is being used (it may also be functioning analogically) or about the nature of the value of our variable. But believers are committed to the belief that some 'existential' claim is being made such that their key religious utterances with a cosmological purport cannot be translated without remainder into practicalistic utterances announcing an intention to adhere to a certain way of life. Furthermore, what would they be praying to and what sense could be given to statements about God creating and sustaining the world on such a non-descriptivist interpretation of God-talk? Both Bertrand Russell and Father Copleston have no trouble in agreeing that the word 'God' is taken by the faithful to stand for a "supreme personal being — distinct from the world and creator of the world."⁵ The non-descriptivist would certainly be right in saying that we have no clear understanding of what the key terms mean in the above definition offered by Copleston. However, we can readily see, if we have a participant's grasp of *first-order* God-talk, that any definition of these terms that a non-descriptive theory could offer would be of necessity a low-redefinition, just as to define an M.D. as someone who can administer first aid is a low-redefinition.⁶

⁵ Bertrand Russell and F. C. Copleston, "The Existence of God: A Debate," in Bertrand Russell, *Why I Am Not a Christian*, (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1957), p. 144.

⁶ The term "low-redefinition" is Paul Edwards'. He says, "... we shall refer to a redefinition of a word which includes something but not all of what the ordinary definition includes and which includes nothing else as a 'low redefinition.'" Paul Edwards, "Bertrand Russell's Doubts about Induction," *Logic and Language*, (First Series), Antony Flew (ed.), (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1952), p. 60.

The above criticism of non-descriptivist theories needs fuller statement and more subtle qualification. But in amplifying and qualifying my criticism I should only be going over ground already ably covered by Passmore, Penelhum, Horsburgh, and C. B. Martin on the one hand, and by such orthodox philosopher-theologians as Mascall, Copleston, Crombie and Hick on the other.⁷ The core of the attack on non-descriptivism in theology is the claim that tolerably orthodox believers take such utterances as 'There is a God,' 'God loves mankind,' 'God created the world' to be factual assertions purporting to make materially true or false statements, and if our explication intends to explicate religious discourse in its actual context with the expectations that tolerably orthodox believers are committed to when they are making actual claims about God, then this core belief of theirs must be taken into account. But it is just here where non-descriptivist analyses fail.

Such non-descriptive analyses have been taken and usually were intended as elucidations of the logic of God-talk. They are taken as attempts to perspicuously display the use that religious utterances have or at least to explicate certain central strands of that use. Taken in this way — as they have been — they fail, but if taken instead as *reconstructing* rather than simply *elucidating* religious claims, they have a considerably greater plausibility.

Looked at in this light R. B. Braithwaite's "An Empiricists' View of the Nature of Religious Belief" gains a new interest.⁸ Braithwaite is roughly in agreement with the kind of critique I have made of theistic 'transcendental conceptions;' he indeed thinks that those 'cosmological or metaphysical claims' should be, nay must be, jettisoned by the Jew and the Christian for they are incoherent. Jewish and Christian belief must be radically reconstructed so that

⁷ John Passmore, "Christianity and Positivism," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 35 (1957); Terence Penelhum "Faith, Fact and Philosophy," *Toronto Quarterly* (1956-57); H. Horsburgh, "Mr. Hare on Theology and Falsification," *The Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 6 (July, 1956) and "Professor Braithwaite and Billy Brown," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 36 (November, 1958); C. B. Martin, *Religious Belief*, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1959); Chapter 1; E. L. Mascall, *Words and Images*: London; Longmans Green, 1957); F. C. Copleston, *Contemporary Philosophy* (London: London; Barnes & Oates, 1956); I. M. Crombie, "The Possibility of Theological Statements," in *Faith and Logic*, Basil Mitchell (ed.) (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1957); and John Hick, "Theology and Verification," *Theology Today*, Vol. XVII (April, 1960), pp. 17-31.

⁸R. B. Braithwaite, "An Empiricist's View of the Nature of Religious Belief," in *Christian Ethics and Contemporary Philosophy*, I. T. Ramsey (ed.), (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1966).

we keep only its 'ethical heart' and the heuristically valuable parabolic superstructure. We should come to see religion simply as a way of life. Religious beliefs are basically ethical beliefs. They help us to attain orientation in a world which would otherwise be a Spiritual Wasteland. It is here and not in some incoherent cosmology that we find the essence of religion. To the extent that death-of-God theologians are doing anything very intelligible, they are carrying out in more detail such a Braithwaitian program of reconstruction. And this in fact is very much what Paul van Buren and Richard Rubenstein are doing.

Such a reconstructionist endeavor, when consciously and consistently pursued, is not subject to the semantical criticisms that I have made of non-descriptivism taken as an interpretation rather than a reconstruction of religious discourse. My arguments against non-descriptivism as a *reconstruction* of Judeo-Christianity are essentially normative or moral.⁹ Jews and Christians, no matter how existentialist or radical they become, tend to think, as Richard Rubenstein and John Macquarrie do, that to put aside even such a radically reconstructed Judaism and Christianity would lead, in Macquarrie's words, "to a severe impoverishment of personal life."¹⁰ It would be very helpful to have a coherent argument for this claim. Nobody with the least knowledge of the world would deny that some people, indoctrinated in a certain way, very much need their religion. But it is also obvious that there have been a great number of thoroughly secular people (and the number is steadily increasing) who do not feel the need for a religious orientation; such people find that their lives, rather than being severely impoverished, are often enriched by their escape from what to them was a religious yoke. Religion can be oppressive as well as liberating. And let us not commit the Smerdyakov-fallacy and assume that the liberation need always or even usually take an infantile direction. Too many people have too long kidded themselves or flattered themselves into thinking that men without religious commitment must be or even are likely to be hollow men. And since the validity and even sustaining power of a belief is not dependent on its origin, that secular *Weltanschauungen* grew out of religious *Weltanschauungen* does not make the former dependent on the latter. As far as I can see, there are no good grounds for believing that an abandonment, particularly as a natural

⁹Kai Nielsen, *Ethics Without God*, (London: Pemberton Books, 1973). See also my exchange with Yandell over Braithwaite's account. Keith Yandell, (ed.) *God, Man and Religion* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973), pp. 230-245.

¹⁰John Macquarrie *God-Talk*, (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1967), p. 181.

development out of philosophical and moral criticism, of Jewish or Christian belief or even of any religious belief whatsoever would impoverish, let alone severely impoverish, personal life. In fact I should think the reverse would be true.

That this, as Rubenstein believes, only holds true for a few knowledgeable, clear-headed and comfortably placed intellectuals, would, if true, show a) — as Freud stressed — that without a sane education religious belief, psychologically speaking, has an iron grip on most people and b) — as Marx stressed — that in wretched or extensively alienating circumstances religious belief is a generally quite irresistible illusion. But such considerations do not show that men in their very human natures are such that to make sense of existence, they must believe in God. Such a claim on the part of religious apologists is extremely vulnerable on both anthropological and philosophical grounds.

Normative argument about competing *Weltanschauungen* aside, let us return again to non-descriptivism, considering it, as it intends to be taken, as the type of theory which attempts to elucidate God-talk rather than as a radical reconstruction of religious belief. There are some who will maintain that I have been too severe in what I will countenance as a tolerably orthodox interpretation of religious belief. I have fallen, it could be argued, into what J. C. Thornton has aptly called ‘secular Tertullianism’, i.e., “If it is not absurd it cannot be the Christian faith.”¹¹

However, things are not as simple as that, for the very notion of what counts as an absurdity *vis-a-vis* religion differs radically even among educated Westerners. What Mascall or Trethowan can swallow without batting an eye, I and some religious believers as well find a scandal to the intellect. In an acutely perceptive essay, “Religious Belief and ‘Reductionism’,” Thornton points out that we have yet to produce satisfactory criteria for distinguishing between reductionist and non-reductionist analyses of religious discourse and that at present, at any rate, the concept of reductionism does not give us a key as to whether a given analysis is an adequate account of the nature of religious belief. I agree with the main thrust of Thornton’s argument, but I do not think it calls for a change in my criticisms of non-descriptivism, though some of the things I have said might *seem* to run athwart Thornton’s strictures, for I have all along maintained, as a piece of descriptive anthropology if you will, that there is a

¹¹J. C. Thornton, “Religious Belief and ‘Reductionism’,” *Sophia*, Vol. V, no. 3 (October, 1966), p. 13.

certain minimum content to Jewish, Christian and Islamic belief and that an elucidation of God-talk — a *second-order* interpretation, as distinct from a normative reconstruction of that belief — must square with (must be in accordance with) this minimum content, if it is to be an adequate analysis of such God-talk or an interpretation of such belief.

The minimum content I have in mind is this: to be a Jew, Christian or Moslem is to believe in the reality of one and only one God who is infinite, transcendent to the universe, who is thought to have created the universe out of nothing and upon whom man, a sinful finite creature, is dependent and in whom man will discover the *raison d'être* for his existence. I am, of course, aware that concepts like transcendence, creation, sin and dependence have a long history and are subject to various interpretations. But there is a limit to how far they can be stretched. I have argued that non-descriptivists cannot account for these concepts and do at least in effect jettison them as 'metaphysical excess baggage'. It is their belief that such metaphysical beliefs are neither conducive to salvation nor part of 'the essence of Judaism or Christianity.' But this, I have argued, is for good or for ill rationally to reconstruct Christianity, rather than to perspicuously display the nature and fundamentals of Christian belief.

It can be countered that such a characterization of the minimum content of Jewish and Christian belief ignores the Process Theologians (Hartshorne, Ogden, Cobb, and Williams), for they do not in their theologies have an infinite and transcendent Deity and thus by my very characterization of what it is to be a Jew or Christian I rule them out by definitional fiat. And so I do! I find their cumbersome Whiteheadian metaphysical conceptions thoroughly incoherent. They are so replete with problematical conceptions that it is quite impossible to build anything on them that is not a house of cards. But all that aside — and more to the point here — even if they had a philosophically coherent *second-order* theological superstructure, in jettisoning an infinite and transcendent Deity, they have switched subjects on us. Their God is clearly the God of some philosophers who no longer feel they can make sense of traditional Jewish and Christian conceptions and instead of trying to explicate the concept of God in those traditions they explicate a concept of some *Ersatz* God of dubious philosophical manufacture.

The Jewish and Christian traditions have indeed repeatedly changed and if they hold on for the next two hundred years they will continue to do so and very likely at an accelerated rate. Given a considerable shift in social and intellectual conditions, the change

may even be rather considerable. Perhaps if that happens, people will continue to call themselves Jews and Christians even though they reject what I have characterized above as a minimum content for Jewish and Christian belief. (The brief flurry of interest in what has been called radical or Death-of-God theologies perhaps suggests that that may happen.) But if they do, they will have radically altered *what it is that is being talked about* in talking of Jewish and Christian belief. In such an event the Judeo-Christian tradition would be even more radically changed than would the Marxian tradition if it were to substitute for its basically Hegelian structure and epistemology a Humean one. Whatever came out would hardly be Marxism anymore just as what comes out of a process theology, which denies that God is infinite and transcendent, will hardly be Christianity anymore. In fine my contention is that what I have claimed above is the minimum or at least part of the minimum core content of Christianity, Judaism and Islam. Whatever does not have that content is not Christian, Jewish or Islamic, though there may be some other properties which are essential to those religions as well. It is conceptions with this content that philosophers need to analyze and examine for coherence when they examine Jewish and Christian belief.

To the extent (if at all) that these remarks of mine about minimum content for Jewish and Christian belief are overly narrow, when we consider these traditions and their development (or at least change) with a careful historical sense, then to that extent Thornton's remarks concerning our inability to distinguish between reductionist and 'non-reductionist' accounts of religion have a still greater force than even my previous remarks allow. If I am wrong in my claim about a minimum core, then it may well be true, as Feuerbach remarks, that today's atheism will be tomorrow's Christianity or Judaism.

The non-descriptivist cannot elude the difficulties set out in the paragraphs just before the immediately preceding one by drawing from Thornton's perspective arguments about reductionism. I could agree with Thornton that we have no adequate general criterion for what is reductionistic and what is not in this conceptual area and still maintain that the non-descriptivist accounts are so extreme that they do not square with the actual use of the religious discourse. Mascall quite appropriately remarks of Thornton's contentions concerning reductionism: if we cannot always ascertain whether or not a characterization of the religious doctrine squares with the substance of that doctrine, it does not follow that we never can. Even without an adequate criterion for what is reductionist and what is not, we can

still recognize that 'God created the heavens and the earth' does not *mean* 'The laws of nature fit together in a harmonious way.'¹² Like the descriptivists, I have tried to discover what those religious foundations are but unlike them, I also have tried to show that these foundations are in shambles and to point out how very different religion would in fact become if we were to accept the 'new foundations' of the non-descriptivists.

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¹²E. L. Mascall, "Theological Reductionism," *Sophia*, Vol. VI, no. 2 (July, 1967), p. 3. This point of Mascall's is well taken but, as Thornton shows in a reply ("Reductionism — A Reply to Dr. Mascall," *Sophia*, Vol. VI, no. 2, July, 1967), he was not really denying this contention but claiming that we have not yet given an adequate criterion of what is reductionistic and what is not in religious discourse and thus it is not a very useful concept in theological discussion. See also in this connection the discussion between Keith Yandell and myself in Keith Yandell, (ed.), *God, Man and Religion*, (New York; McGraw-Hill, 1973), pp.230-245.