of the "mystery" by which subjects 'work by themselves' within their designated places in the social formation. I quote in full:

> The whole mystery of this effect lies ... in the ambiguity of the term *subject.* In the ordinary use of the term, subject in fact means: (1) a free subjectivity, a centre of initiatives, author of and responsible for its actions; (2) a subjected being, who submits to a higher authority, and is therefore stripped of all freedom except that of freely accepting his submission. This last note gives us the meaning of this ambiguity, which is merely a reflection of the effect that produces it: the individual *is interpellated as a (free) subject in order that he shall submit freely to the commandments of the Subject, i.e. in order that he shall (freely) accept his subjection,* i.e. in order that he shall make the gestures and actions of his subjection 'all by himself'. *There are no subjects except by and for their subjection.* That is why they 'work all by themselves'.

It is this 'truth', which ideology articulates quite plainly for itself, without equivocation—"it is not you who will be speaking, the Spirit of your Father will be speaking in you"—that has to be *known,* in theory, and *overcome,* in practice.

Religion, Truth and Language Games

Brian Davies O.P.

When people become religious believers, when they talk about their religion or engage in verbal activity in practising it, what are they doing? Although he does not believe that a simple, unqualified answer can be given to this question, Patrick Sherry[1] thinks that it is important, that certain ideas of Wittgenstein are a help in trying to answer it and that a proper answer raises problems of truth and justification which are often ignored: "Let us then ask ourselves what pictures and concepts are used in religion and theology: we want to know how doctrines are related to the world—what is their subject matter and what kind of description are they trying to provide? Now it is unlikely that we will be able to reach a simple answer to such questions, because so-called 'religious language' is of many different kinds ... even putatively 'descriptive' or 'fact-stating' uses of religious language are of many types (p. 18)...

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We need to ask how and why the religious 'universe of discourse', which supposedly structures the believer's experience, ever arose in the first place (p. 45) ... There are three tasks which need to be tackled if we are to produce a viable Wittgensteinian philosophy of religion. These are to characterise the language-games and forms of life of religion by explaining their place in our lives and experience, to relate them to other language-games, and to deal candidly with the problems of truth and justification. I shall call these three tasks 'locating', 'relating' and 'validating' respectively (p. 49) ... Religious concepts are neither simply abstracted, nor inherited through our language, culture or mental structure; rather they have developed through time as men have sought to describe, understand and explain their experience (p. 104) ... There is an interdependence between religious concepts, beliefs, activities, forms of life and institutions (p. 131) ... We cannot acquiesce in the easy view that all religions ultimately express the same truth (p. 172) ... If we divorce religious truth from ordinary propositional truth, it will be hard to explain why we should continue to use the term 'truth' in religious contexts (p. 172) ... I do not think that any general account of religious truth can be given beyond the kind which I have provided: we can only look at each case on its merits, to see if a concept has application, a language-game has a point or a judgment is true (p. 185)."

Sherry frequently criticises philosophers like D. Z. Phillips for writing about religion in the name of Wittgenstein while actually displaying a failure to learn from him. Such condemnation is just and more can be said on its behalf than even Sherry suggests. Phillips is far too undiscriminating in his references to 'religious belief' and 'philosophy'. Conclusions about such abstract inventions are useless for, as Sherry rightly says (p.188), "there can be no *general* answers here: we can only examine each case individually". Phillips says that "philosophy is neither for nor against religion." (*The Concept of Prayer,* London, 1965, p. 10) Which philosophy? Whose religion? According to Phillips, evidence is irrelevant to religious belief in that 'grammatical' considerations show religious belief to be unaffected by 'what is the case' or 'the way things go'. Such observations get us nowhere; we can neither agree nor disagree with them for they are intrinsically unclear. Religious belief is expressed in language or in ways of talking and Wittgenstein regarded these as constantly changing. "A language-game", he remarks in *On Certainty* (256, cf. 63,65,646), "does change with time." Why does it change? Not because people arbitrarily decide to change it or because it just changes. Sometimes, says Wittgenstein, language-games change because evidence changes or because new evidence comes to light. "It is always by favour of Nature that one knows something." (O.C. 505) Again, "Whether *I know* something depends on whether the evidence backs me up or con-

tradicts me. For to say one knows one has a pain means nothing."
(O.C. 504) Phillips maintains that 'every human being has two
human parents' is not, in Wittgenstein's view, either an hypothesis
or a proposition based on experience. (*Religion Without Explanation*, Oxford, 1966, Chapter 10) As such, he adds, it is logically
akin to religious statements in that it is unjustifiable. In fact, what
Wittgenstein wrote was: "I believe that every human being has two
human parents; but Catholics believe that Jesus only had a human
mother ... What is the belief that all human beings have parents
based on? On experience. And how can I base this sure belief on
my experience? Well, I base it not only on the fact that I have
known the parents of certain people but on everything that I have
learnt about the sexual life of human beings and their anatomy
and physiology: also on what I have heard and seen of animals.
But then is that really a proof? Isn't this an hypothesis, which, as I
believe, is again and again completely confirmed?" (O.C. 239-241)

For its attack on certain supposed developments of Wittgenstein's thinking, *Religion, Truth and Language-Games* may therefore be welcomed. On the remainder of its content, however, some
reservation is in order. Sherry ascribes to Phillips the view that "all
religions ultimately express the same truth". (p. 172) He also
quotes Phillips as saying that "As a philosopher it is not my task
to decide on anyone's behalf who the true God is ... To say that
the criteria of truth and falsity in religion are to be found within
religious traditions is to say nothing of the truth and falsity of the
religion in question." (*The Concept of Prayer*, pp. 149, 27) On
this Sherry comments: "At first sight all this reads like a gross confusion amounting to little more than the observation that different
religions claim different 'truths' and the logical comment that they
cannot all be really true. One is tempted to retort that no one is
asking Phillips to arbitrate between different religions. The whole
point at issue is that if the truth claims of different religions conflict and there seems to be no way in principle of resolving such
disagreements (unlike scientific ones), then the whole status of religious 'truth' or 'knowledge' is called into question. Phillips seems
to be admitting the difficulty and yet saying limply 'well, it's none
of my business', apparently failing to realise that it drives a coach
and horses through his whole argument. No wonder that one critic
accused him of confusing the question of what is truly religious
with that of what is religious truth," (p. 39, cf. p. 167) This is unfair. Phillips never claims that 'all religions ultimately express the
same truth'—whatever that might mean. Nor do Phillips's quoted
remarks entail that one religion or one religious belief is true. Phillips is not arbitrating between different religions because he is not
clear about what such a task amounts to. According to Sherry,
Phillips fails to consider the traditional, metaphysical claims held
by religious believers and therefore tends to 'reductionism'. But

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Phillips does not deny that religious believers can be metaphysicians. His point is that, when they are such, they are victims of bad philosophy but that this does not mean that everything they say and do can be written off as the product of confusion. This conclusion is indeed unacceptable, but not for reasons laid down by Sherry. To Phillips's distinction between 'metaphysics', 'philosophy' and 'religion' the proper reply is not that Phillips's particular distinction is mistaken, that, for example, 'religion' can be 'metaphysical'. No distinctions should be made at all here; all general distinctions between 'metaphysics', 'philosophy' and 'religion' are senseless and so are all general attempts to correct them. There is no patient to be cured. It is pointless to deny that something called 'a metaphysical belief' can be 'a religious belief', but it is just as pointless to deny the denial. Sherry believes that there is a genuine disagreement between what he and Phillips say, yet he does not indicate why we should accept this. "The early Fathers of the Church", he explains (p. 43), "clearly intended the Creeds and other doctrinal formulations to express true propositions, i.e. ones giving correct descriptions of actual states of affairs, difficult though it be for us to understand the metaphysical and eschatological strands in them." One can call the Creeds expressions of 'true propositions' and one can then baptise them 'metaphysical'; but what has one gained thereby? To say that the Creeds are intended to express true propositions is certainly to say that they purport to give correct descriptions of actual states of affairs; but this is not to say what they are and it contradicts nothing. "'The general form of proposition is: This is how things are".–That is the kind of proposition that one repeats to oneself countless times. One thinks that one is tracing the outline of the thing's nature over and over again, and one is merely tracing round the frame through which we look at it." (*Investigations,* para. 114)

So much for Sherry and Phillips; what about Sherry and Wittgenstein? Here also Sherry is premature. He is, he says, grappling with the production of "a viable Wittgensteinian philosophy of religion" (p. 49) and some of his remarks genuinely reflect emphases in Wittgenstein's thinking. Here one might note Sherry's demand to observe the many uses to which language, including 'religious language', is put. Sherry's reluctance to generalise about 'religious truth and meaning' can also find support in the sort of enquiry Wittgenstein adopted. But what about Sherry's use of *On Certainty* 617? Sherry wishes to draw attention to the much neglected suggestion of Wittgenstein that what we say is not completely unaffected by non-linguistic facts. Thus he usefully quotes *On Certainty* 63 ("If we imagine the facts otherwise than as they are, certain language-games lose some of their importance, while others become more important.") and *Investigations* para. 142. Later, however, Sherry writes: "Wittgenstein argues that certain contin-

gent facts place limits on the possibility and nature of our language-games. Although, as we saw in Chapter 2, language-games cannot be justified or criticised as wholes, it is nevertheless true that both natural events and human needs are necessary conditions and that if these conditions were otherwise than they are, our language-games would be different." (p.70) Then follows the quotation of *On Certainty* 617: "Indeed, doesn't it seem obvious that the possibility of a language-game is conditioned by certain facts?" it is not clear that 'is conditioned by' and 'is a necessary condition of ' are equivalent—but let that pass. The real difficulty is to see how *On Certainty* 617 can be used to draw any definite conclusions. For Wittgenstein's very next words, unquoted by Sherry, are: "In that case it would seem as if the language-game must 'show' (*zeigen*) the facts that make it possible. (But that's not how it is)". Clearly, Wittgenstein was unhappy about the idea of 'facts' conditioning language-games. From what he says in *On Certainty*, it seems that the *Tractatus* problem about the relationship between language and reality remained a worry to him in some sense. He feels the pull of talking about language somehow picturing or reflecting facts, but he recognises dangers here: *Aber so ist es nicht*. To appeal to Wittgenstein in attempting to relate religious belief to facts is not therefore in order. On the relationship between language and facts Wittgenstein was just puzzled. Sherry does not adequately allow for this nor does he attach to it the obvious importance which it has. Ultimately, Sherry wishes to open up the issue of natural theology; he thinks that religious beliefs, especially those about the existence and nature of God, should be justified with reference to facts. But how are we to distinguish between the facts which condition language and what is said in the language? Sherry assumes that we can take a statement like 'There is a God' and ask what facts support it. But what is this 'world' to which doctrines can or ought to be related? What is this 'ordinary propositional truth' of which Sherry often speaks and of which he says that it is supposedly and possibly shared by religious and non-religious utterances? What can it mean to say that religious beliefs might appeal to evidence and what could this evidence be evidence of? If Sherry wishes to develop his present conclusions he would do well to recognise how real these problems are.