Abstract

Hick, Faith, Science, and the Twentieth Century

Over the past several years John Hick has developed a view of theistic faith which is philosophically sophisticated and religiously sensitive. In this paper I first attempt to develop an overall interpretation of Hick's position and offer several piecemeal criticisms of it. I then offer "diagnosis" of why Hick cannot, in his own terms, develop a coherent defense of theism and suggest a basic strategy for avoiding the problems he encounters. This strategy results in a defense of theistic faith that is philosophically coherent, but its result is to lay bare the genuine difficulty with being a theist in the late twentieth century.
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I

Over the past several years, John Hick has developed a view of theistic faith which must, I think, be acknowledged to be of considerable importance. It is philosophically sophisticated and religiously sensitive. It is sufficiently orthodox in its theism that both believers and skeptics know what is being defended, and the philosophical principles used are sufficiently clear that one knows how it is being defended. In having these characteristics, it is strikingly different from much of the influential apologetics of the twentieth century (Tillich comes to mind). Nonetheless, it is finally unsuccessful.

In Sections II and III below I attempt to develop an interpretation and criticism of Hick's account. In Section IV and V, I offer a "diagnosis" of why Hick cannot, in his terms, develop a coherent defense of theism and suggest a basic strategy for avoiding the problems he encounters. Finally, in Section VI, there are some admittedly sketchy remarks to the effect that, while the "Hick-revised" view of V is philosophically successful, it lays bare the genuine difficulty with being a theist in the late twentieth century. In the remainder of this section, I shall simply lay out, largely by means of quotation, the bases of Hick's position. This is for the benefit of what I suspect is a rather rare creature, the reader of this article who is unacquainted with Hick's views.

Hick characterizes his view of faith as "non-propositional." To have theistic faith is to experience the world in a certain way rather than to assent to certain propositions. The well-known "puzzle-picture" phenomenon serves as the basic element in his analysis.

1 The first draft of the paper was written while in residence at the Department of Religious Studies of Yale University working under a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. I should like to thank the Endowment for its generous support.
There is, for example, the page covered apparently with random lines and dots which you may suddenly come to see as the picture of a human face; or the ambiguous duck-rabbit shape which you can see either as a duck's head facing left or as a rabbit's head facing right. In such cases two people or the same person at different times may perceive the same marks on paper in significantly different ways. Wittgenstein spoke of 'seeing as'; you see it as your mind interprets it, as a duck or as a rabbit. Now expand this notion into that of 'experiencing as' not only visually but through all the organs of perception functioning together. We experience situations in different ways as having different kinds of significance and so as rendering appropriate different practical responses. To come straight to the religious case, the prophets experienced their historical situation as one in which they were living under the sovereign claim of God and in which the appropriate way for them to act was as God's agents; whereas to most of their contemporaries the situation did not have this religious significance.... When for example, the Babylonians were at the gates of Jerusalem the prophet Jeremiah experienced this, not simply as a foreign political threat but also as God's judgment upon Israel for her national selfishness and irreligion. It is important to appreciate that this was not an interpretation in the sense of a theory imposed retrospectively upon remembered events. It was the way in which the prophet actually experienced and participated in these events at the time. He consciously lived in the situation interpreted in this way. He was 'experiencing as'.

'The world' is not given to us 'complete'. We, as perceivers, organize 'the given' in every case. All seeing is 'seeing as'; more broadly, all experiencing is 'experiencing as'.

Superficially it may appear that Hick's position is that the person of faith experiences God as others experience (see, hear, etc.) chairs, cats, or rain falling on the roof. The experience of God, on this account, is one particular experience among others. But for Hick, God does not present himself on an occasion, blotting out all experience of other things. Instead, there are three levels of interpretation of all of our experience that are more basic than the experience of any particular objects. There is, first, the interpretation of our experience "which reveals to us the very existence of a material world." It is logically possible that my life is a dream, and it is a "primary

interpretative act... which carries us beyond the solipsist predicament into an objective world of enduring, causally interacting objects, which we share with other people." Our common non-solipsistic interpretation is "unevidenced and unevidenciable.... There is no event within our phenomenal experience the occurrence or nonoccurrence of which is relevant to the truth or falsity of the solipsist hypothesis."^3

The next level of interpretation is that of moral awareness. This presupposes the acknowledgment that the external world and other people exist. The issue here does not concern this or that particular obligation; it is whether one is aware of moral obligation at all. Again, the acknowledgment is unevidence and unevidenciable. "As in the case of natural situational significance, we can enter the sphere of ethical significance only by our own act of interpretation.... If a man chooses to be a moral solipsist, or absolute egoist, recognizing no responsibility toward other people, no one can prove to him that he has any such responsibilities."^4 To put the point in a way that Hick does not: there can be no answer to the question, "why should I be moral?", that is both genuinely relevant and non-question begging. Either an individual experiences his interactions with others in the world in moral terms or he does not.

The third level of interpretation is the theistic one, which presupposes both of the others. "As ethical significance interpenetrates natural significance, so religious significance interpenetrates both ethical and natural. The divine is the highest and ultimate order of significance, mediating neither of the others and yet mediated through both of them."^5 Hick offers an analogy: suppose that I enter a room and hear a conspiracy being hatched to overthrow the government. I listen, horrified. Then I realize that I have accidentally stumbled into the set of a film being made. "Now I interpret it as having practical significance of a quite different kind. But there is no corresponding change in the observable course of events. The meeting of the "secret society" proceeds as before, although now I believe the state of affairs to be quite other than I had previously supposed it to be. The

^4 F and K, pp. 112-113.
^5 F and K, p. 113.
same phenomena are interpreted as constituting an entirely different practical situation." We may apprehend our situation as being one in which there is "an omnipotent, personal Will whose purpose toward mankind guarantees men's highest good and blessedness" or we may apprehend our world as of only natural and moral significance. It is as if we expanded the photographer's studio into the entire world, so that there is "no direction in which we can turn in search of new clues which might reveal the significance of our situation." In the filmmaking case there is an outside vantage point from which we can determine which is the correct interpretation of our situation. Whether or not we should accept theism cannot be determined by adopting such an outside vantage point. Either we interpret, experience, the world theistically or we do not. As on the preceding two levels, our decision is unevidenced because it is unevidenciable.

If there is no outside vantage point to determine which interpretations are correct, does it make sense to characterize them as correct or incorrect at all? Hick's answer is that the theistic interpretation is verifiable, not in this life, but in another. Our present situation is ambiguous, but "Christian doctrine postulates an ultimate unambiguous state of existence....The alleged future experience of this state cannot, of course, be appealed to as evidence for theism as a present interpretation for our experience; but it does suffice to render the choice between theism and atheism a real and not a merely empty or verbal choice."9

6F and K, p. 114. The movie set analogy appears misplaced in my exposition. For it is meant to explicate the notion of a "total interpretation," and one would expect it to apply to each of the three levels of interpretation, since they are presented as essentially similar in type. But I am merely following Hick in this. He characterizes theism as a "uniquely 'total interpretation'" (on p. 114; repeated on p. 121) and he offers the movie set analogy to elucidate only it. I do not know why Hick does either of these. There may be a good reason for the latter, but it is not one which Hick would intend (see note 43 below).

7F and K, p. 115.
8F and K, p. 114.
These are the basics of Hick's position. As with any interesting philosophical view, the situation is not so simple when looked at more closely.

II

An adequate account of faith, for Hick, must make it "a state which it is rational to be in, but which...reasoning cannot put one in."\(^{10}\) This puts two constraints\(^{11}\) on an adequate account of faith: no Tertullian or Kierkegaard, Hick cannot countenance a faith whose content is contrary to the dictates of reason; nonetheless, faith cannot be coerced, even by reason. It must involve a free decision by each individual.\(^{12}\) The first of these is an intellectual constraint (it is irrational to believe what is contrary to reason! a tautology which would cut no ice with Kierkegaard, but nor could any non-tautology cut that sort of ice). The second is a religious constraint (for faith to be a religious good, it must be freely chosen; there is no virtue in what is coerced).

There are other constraints which Hick places on an adequate account of faith. It must square with paradigm cases of theistic faith, the faith of the prophets or of Jesus himself. Such faith is not merely a matter of holding to a


\(^{11}\)Whereas the exposition of Hick's views in Section I of this paper is purely exposition, any "exposition" beyond I is more aptly called interpretation. For instance, Hick does not talk of "constraints" on an adequate account of faith. The constraints are gleaned from things he says in various contexts.

sets of beliefs which might be just an addendum to one's everyday life. God is experienced as working in the events related in scripture and within our everyday experience. It is then a lived and a living faith.\(^4\) Fourth, faith cannot be provisional. It must be held without tentativeness, and it must be such that it is appropriate, i.e., not irrational, to hold it in this way. This means that it cannot be any sort of hypothesis, since hypotheses must be held provisionally, subject to revision in the light of new evidence.\(^5\)

The final constraint is that faith must be the result of revelation and in accordance with its nature. Revelation does not come about by propositions being infallibly revealed to man. The locus of revelation is events: the deliverance of the Jews out of Egypt, the life of Jesus of Nazareth, the purposiveness of everyday occurrences of our lives. Revelation does not consist of God telling us truths; it consists of our being shown. Thus it is perceptual and "non-propositional."\(^6\)

To construe faith as a matter of "seeing as," where such seeing is "optional," neither dictated by nor contrary to reason, is, Hick thinks, to construe it so that it is within all of the constraints. Exactly how this is to work depends on just how we understand some of the vagaries of Hick's account. There are at least four different alternatives which he seems to embrace at one time or the other.

12(continued) pp. 17-18). I do not find his overall position on this issue to be very clear beyond the statement that faith must not be coerced, by reason or anything else.

13This is evident in the exposition of Section I above. Notice that even though Hick's examples of theism are always examples of Christianity and/or Judaism, to be a theist need not be to be a Christian or Jew. Islam is the other clearly theistic major religion. Also, it is at least in principle possible simply to believe that the theistic God exists without holding any of the other beliefs (e.g., Jesus was God's son) that go into making up particular theistic religions. One would suspect that such a "scaled-down" theism would be of no more lasting interest than was 18th century deism.

14"Religious faith is absolute and implicit belief; the articles of a creed are not merely provisional assumptions" (\(F \text{ and } K\), p. 55). This combines with the claim that faith is "a state which it is rational to be in" to produce the result that it must be rational to hold to faith non-provisionally.

1) Having presented revelation as non-propositional, Hick describes faith with the same adjective, and he speaks of faith and revelation as if they were but two sides of the same coin. Revelation consists in our being shown; faith consists in our willingness to see. Revelation is that which is revealed; faith is acceptance of that which is revealed. Therefore, if revelation does not take the form of propositions being presented to mankind, then faith "does not consist in the intellectual acceptance of...propositions but in the concrete interpretation of life and all that it brings in religious terms, seeing its requirements, disciplines, mercies, rebukes, and joys as mediating the divine presence." For Hick, faith as seeing the world in a certain way is non-propositional and so is a natural correlate of his view of revelation. This, at least, is the sort of thing he says. I now want to suggest that it cannot be what he really intends.

I look out one hundred feet from shore, and I see a gull floating on the surface of the bay. It stays in about the same position for longer than a gull should. I take out my binoculars. I cannot be certain what it is. Perhaps it is a lobster buoy. I look again, and I still see a gull floating in the same spot, but I hold no beliefs. Still, every time I look at it, I see a gull. Down the shoreline, I see an unidentifiable object. I know there is no buoy there. There is no trash in the bay. I believe that it is a gull. When I look I can see a gull but not believe that it is a gull. I can believe that it is a gull but not see a gull.

Harry was brought up in a devout family. He believed what the church said he should believe, and he saw in every event God's will at work. There was never any question but that he would be ordained. His faith was like that of the prophets, his friends told him. But then things began to change. By the age of thirty, he believed what he had always believed. He would still have laid down his life for his religion, and yet he no longer saw God's will at work in the deaths of small children. He only believed that there must be a reason for those deaths. Harry performed his priestly duties, but things were not the same. Now he only believed. (As a child, Henry wanted to be the world's finest soccer player and believed he would be. His world was the world of soccer and the world was soccer. At eighteen, Henry was very, very good but the World Cup seemed far away. The world was different, but he believed.)

16F and K, p. 215. See also, p. 91: We must ask "whether faith, in its primary sense, is rightly regarded as a propositional attitude at all" (italics added).
Herbert started out in much the way that Harry did. But then he read Russell and the history of theology, gave up his belief, and renounced his calling. Still he could not help but see God's hand in every event that transpired around him. (Hobart took no stock in talk of an afterlife. But from the moment his mother died, he experienced every aspect of his life as if she were watching. His sex life was never the same.)

If faith is a matter of seeing and is non-propositional, then it must be like the seeing in the first gull case. A gull is seen, but no belief that there is a gull there is involved. There cannot be, since there is no propositional element present. Faith as seeing of this sort is non-provisional, but for the wrong sorts of reasons. I look at the puzzle picture and see a duck. It is a fact that I see a duck (duck-picture). I look at a (real) rabbit and see a rabbit...or perhaps I see a duck. It is a fact that I see a duck...I see a rabbit. My visual organization "switches," and I hold no beliefs about the (real) object of my perception. We are dealing with psychological facts about my perception. There is no place for irrationality or for provisionality because there is nothing to be irrational or provisional about. No claim is made; no belief is held. There is only the fact of the experience. Seeing without believing, "mere seeing," is simply something that occurs.

Hick is concerned to deny that merely believing constitutes faith. Harry believes, but his "faith" is just assenting to propositions, not experiencing his religion at work in the world. No doubt this is not the faith of the prophets. Instead, says Hick, faith is seeing, and it is non-propositional. Herbert sees the world theistically, but this also is "mere seeing." And Herbert (like Hobart) might appropriately believe himself in need of psychiatric counselling. This too is not the faith of the prophets.

The faith of the prophets must involve belief (must be propositional) or it is a "mere seeing." This does not mean that it must be a "mere believing" or that one having such faith ever thinks the thought "God exists"; nor does it mean that the question "does God exist?" is a genuine question for the person of faith. (And, certainly, it does not mean the belief has the status of an hypothesis.) The man on the street (as conceived of in philosophical tradition) does not think the thought, the external world exists and whether it exists is not a genuine question for him. Nonetheless, he not only experiences the world as a world of external objects, he also believes that there is a world of external objects (he takes it that there is such a world).
My argument to this point is meant to show that Hick cannot really maintain that faith is non-propositional and to give some reasons for thinking that no adequate account of faith can be non-propositional. If the aim were only the former, a shorter route would have been possible. For Hick is concerned with "faith that," with an account of faith as cognitive. The blank in "faith that _______" must be filled in with a proposition, and a cognitive account must involve "knowledge that _______." Hick cannot really be attempting to develop a "non-propositional" account of faith.

What then of revelation as non-propositional? While faith-as-seeing or as pure-seeing might seem to be an implication or at least a "natural correlate" of revelation-as-showing, the latter neither necessitates nor even indicates the former. What one is shown one can see, but this in no way indicates that it cannot be believed. The fact that I am put in a position of seeing Borg play a brilliant tennis match (rather than being told that Borg is a brilliant player) does not mean that I can only see-Borg-as-wonderful-player. I believe that Borg is a great player because I have seen him play. The dogma of empiricism is that I can have justified belief only if I have seen. This is a mistake. It is a more crude mistake to think that when we are shown and so see, we cannot believe.

2) Perhaps we should not take so seriously Hick's characterization of faith as non-propositional. Sometimes he gives a different view. "So far as the great primary religious figures are concerned, belief in the reality of God....is not an explanatory hypothesis logically comparable

17 F and K, p. 3. Note that if Hick's error is characterized as not realizing that one may see the world in a certain way without taking it that it is that way, then his mistake is similar (not identical) to one admitted to by Kuhn, who says that he did not earlier fully appreciate that one may be "persuaded" of the truth of a new system without undergoing "conversion," i.e., coming to see in accordance with it, to think in its terms (T.S. Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, 2nd ed., "Postscript" (Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1970), pp. 202-204).

Keith Yandell also argues that Hick "is wrong in supposing that no propositions are involved" in faith and revelation as Hick really wants them to be (Basic Issues in the Philosophy of Religion (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1971), p. 214).
with those developed in the sciences, but a perceptual belief. God was not, for Amos or Jeremiah or Jesus of Nazareth, an inferred entity but an experienced personal presence.  

Here the contrast is between two sorts of grounds for belief: there are beliefs based on experience and there are beliefs based on inferences (hypotheses). Neither of these is "non-propositional."

The distinction between perceptual and inferential belief may seem suspect, for an inference seems needed to bridge the gap between perception and belief. I see a duck...therefore there is a duck there. But while an inference of some sort may be required for perceptual beliefs, there remains "a perfectly good distinction" between believing that there is a rabbit there because I see a rabbit and believing it because of the movement of the tall grass and the stalking behavior of the cat. ("Tell me, Inspector Beck, were there any witnesses or is the evidence all circumstantial?")

There is a more fundamental difficulty in Hick's position, if it is understood as asserting that to have faith is to hold a perceptual belief. For this means that it is rational for Amos or Jeremiah or Jesus to believe that God exists because, for each, God is "an experienced personal presence." The belief is rational just because of the experience; the fact that they experience the world in a certain way itself justifies their belief that it is this way. And it must justify this belief being held in a non-provisional manner.

The difficulty is that it is not in general true that an experience itself justifies belief. Returning to the earlier example, I see a gull but I am not certain that there is a gull there. There are things to do to resolve my uncertainty; there are "checks and tests" to be carried out. I can look

\[18\] Arguments for the Existence of God, p. 116. Hick here and elsewhere compares experiential beliefs in God to quite ordinary perceptual beliefs; here, to the belief that there is a piece of white paper before me (quoted in text above, p. 12).

\[19\] The phrase is Basil Mitchell's. He makes virtually the same point in The Justification of Religious Belief (London: Macmillan, 1973), pp. 115-116. Notice that to say there is an inference from perception to belief is not to be committed to this being either an inference from the mental ("sense data") to the physical or an inference from a neutral (uninterpreted) object to an interpreted one. It is just to say that there is an inference from the experience itself (whatever its nature) to its veridicality.
through binoculars, take pictures, move closer, or throw stones at the object. (What I cannot do is compare my seeing with the object itself, apart from my, or others', experience of it.) If there are any grounds for doubt, such checks and tests are necessary to justify claims that go beyond those concerning the content of my experience. The experience itself is not sufficient to guarantee the rationality of the belief. (And a fortiori not sufficient to justify holding the belief non-provisionally.)

There are cases in which it is tempting to think otherwise. I enter my office and see a piece of white paper on my desk. I now rationally believe that there is a piece of white paper on my desk and in no obvious sense is this a provisional belief (it would not be appropriate to describe it as a "tentative"). Still, it would be a mistake to think that my rational belief in this case is based entirely on my seeing or that it is appropriate to hold the belief non-provisionally. The evidence that it is a piece of paper is so overwhelming that I have no present reason to doubt it, but this evidence does not consist just in my perception. There is often white paper on my desk; in fact I left a piece of white paper there yesterday. I am not on drugs. My eyes are reasonably good. (Such "background knowledge", in effect, comprises the checks and tests that are logically appropriate.)

This is apparent if we imagine that instead of the white paper I see a medium sized anteater on my desk. If I am rational, I shall not believe that there is an anteater there until I have actually carried out some tests, including inviting others in to find out if they also perceive an anteater. Clearly my seeing is not in itself sufficient for non-provisional belief; it may not even be sufficient for belief. In the case of the paper, it seems to be not only rationally justified but also non-provisional because the background knowledge, often unnoticed, together with my perception, may amount to such an overwhelming quantity of evidence that it is difficult to imagine how the belief could be wrong. Yet something could have gone wrong along the way. As certain as the belief is, it should not be held non-provisionally.¹⁰

3) Hick sometimes seems to realize that it is not appropriate to hold even perceptual beliefs in an absolutely non-provisional manner. The perceptual experience may not turn out to justify the belief, because "new data" (and in light of (2) above, "old data") may overcome the evidence of the perceptual experience.

All our beliefs, other than our acceptance of logically self-certifying propositions, are in principle open to revision or retraction in the light of new data. It is always conceivable that something which it is now rational for us to believe, it may one day not be rational for us to believe. But the difference which this general principle properly makes to our present believing varies from a maximum in relation to beliefs involving a considerable theoretical element, such as the higher-level hypotheses of the sciences, to a minimum in relation to perceptual beliefs, such as the belief that I now see a sheet of paper before me. And I have argued that so far as the great primary religious figures are concerned, belief in the reality of God is closer to the latter....

All beliefs are corrigible, but those based on our own experience are less corrigible than beliefs "with a considerable theoretical element." This position seems to give up one of the constraints on an adequate account of faith (that it be non-provisional). But there are more fundamental objections.

First, let us assume that there is a proper dichotomy to be drawn between perceptual and theoretical beliefs (i.e., that the more theoretical the belief, the less perceptual it is) and assume also that it is possible to generalize regarding which of these is least provisional. Given these assumptions, the most plausible position is the opposite of the one drawn by Hick. I.e., the more theoretical the belief, the less provisionally it is appropriately held; the more perceptual the belief, the more provisionally it is appropriately held. My belief that the object in front of me is composed of molecules is less provisional than that it is a telephone. My belief that the animal I see is the result of evolutionary processes is less provisional than that it is a weasel. My belief that what I perceive on my desk is subject to the laws of gravitation is less provisional than that it is a piece of white paper. (Of course some

perceptual beliefs are less provisional than are some theoretical ones. My belief that this is a can of tobacco in front of me is less provisional than that this is a cancer-causing substance. But this does not affect the point that it is not in general true that the more theoretical is the more provisional.)

More basically, the dichotomy between "perceptual beliefs" and "beliefs involving a considerable theoretical element" cannot be maintained. It sounds plausible enough if the examples are the perception of a piece of white paper and the statement of a bit of theory from quantum mechanics. But compare, "From the size, shape and depth of the tracks around the henhouse, it is clear that there is a fox in the neighborhood" and "I see a cathode ray tube." The former is non-perceptual (in terms of the distinction drawn above, it is inferential, an hypothesis), while the latter is perceptual. But the perceptual statement contains a much greater "theoretical content" than does the inferential one. Some perceptions are more "theory-laden" than others, and it is difficult to understand what "theory-free" perception could be. There is no "theoretical/perceptual" dichotomy.

Once the dichotomy between the perceptual and the theoretical is abandoned, then there also ceases to be point to generalizations to the effect that perceptual beliefs are more/less certain than inferential ones. For one can infer to a theory and be mistaken or one can see in terms of a mistaken theory. Insofar as theories can be mistaken, either perceptions or inferences involving them may be mistaken. Indeed the very same theory may for one person at one time be the result of an inference, at another time or for a different person it may be an element in perception. (An Eskimo baby sees a shiny object; Sir Laurence Bragg sees a cathode ray tube; a college freshman may see a tube of glass with small wires inside and infer that it is a cathode ray tube.)

There is a way to resist this sort of view. No one sees cathode ray tubes; one sees a set of colors of certain shapes and infers that it is a cathode ray tube. What one sees is a theory-independent, simple given. Everything else is the

22 This is a broadly Wittgensteinian view. It is very effectively argued in N.R. Hanson's Patterns of Discovery (London: Cambridge U. Press, 1961), Ch. 1.

23 The example is Hanson's, p. 15.
result of inference from this simple given. Whatever is the result of inference from this must be more doubtful than it. But that there are such simple givens has (rightly) fallen from philosophical favor. What is particularly odd is that Hick, who emphasizes that all seeing is "seeing as," should implicitly appeal to such a device.24

4) The purported distinction between perceptual and theoretical beliefs in Hick's writings stands alongside the quite different distinction between, on the one hand, our perception of the external world (qua external), of a realm of moral values, and of theism and, on the other hand, perceptions of particular objects, obligations, and acts of God. To ask whether there is an external world or whether there are objective moral values is to ask a "philosophical" question (an "external" or "framework" question); to ask whether there is a piece of paper before me or whether Johnny ought to tell that Billy cheated on the examination is to ask a common sense ("internal") question. The philosophical issues involve total interpretations which are "unevidenced and evidenciable." The two distinctions are themselves entirely distinct, since it is a perceptual belief that I see a piece of white paper and that what I see is an external object.

Having drawn the distinction between common sense beliefs and philosophical ones which cannot be evidenced, Hick shifts to the other distinction and argues that theists' beliefs are rational and are appropriately held in a non-provisional way just because they are perceptual beliefs. This invites the above response that perception does not justify non-provisional beliefs, since our perceptions may sometimes be mistaken and there are ways of determining when they are.

Instead of taking perceptual beliefs in general as being certain in this way, Hick should consistently emphasize the unevidenciable character of each of the levels of interpretation. I see the world non-solipsistically, morally, theistically. If I take my perceptions as non-provisional, it is not because the evidence is so overwhelming that my perceptions are correct. It is because there can be no evidence beyond the experiences themselves. The world vividly appears in these ways in my experience, and I know there is no possibility of my beliefs on these matters being disconfirmed.

(There is no analogue to the anteater not being tangible or my neighbors seeing only a flowerpot where I see an anteater. Most briefly, if the only possible guide to what to believe is how I see things, then seeing is believing.

III

In Sections IV and V I shall argue that Hick's position is infected with basic assumptions that vitiate the possibility of its succeeding. In this section, I shall present some more piecemeal, more "internal," objections to his position.

A. Hick and James. The discussion in the foregoing section makes clear, I hope, that if Hick's view shows that it is rational to believe, it does so only by drawing and emphasizing a sharp distinction between beliefs for which evidence is relevant and those which are uneviendicable. If, because of what it asserts, evidence cannot possibly be forthcoming for or against some proposition ("there is an external world"), then it is intellectually respectable to accept it without evidence. It would be unreasonable, it might be said, to demand evidence for a proposition, which, by its content, precludes the possibility of there being evidence for it if it were to be true. Put in this way, Hick's position is much like that of James who argues that it is all right to choose to believe in cases in which evidence does not apply.

Against this, it may be urged that when confronted with propositions for which there could be no evidence even if they are true, the rational person will remain agnostic, holding no beliefs on such matters. Or, more strongly, on Occamist grounds, the rational person would believe the ontologically more sparse propositions: there is not an external world, and there is not a God.

But against these, in turn, one could argue that the agnostic position is not a genuine alternative, since non-belief, from the point of view of action (or rewards, to give the argument a Pascalian slant), is tantamount to

25 This is perhaps too simple. The question of unanimity can apply in the cases of the existence of the external world (but only if the question of circularity is ignored) and of moral values. However, if unanimity is the only criterion, it is not a useful one. From a certain spot on the desert, everyone will see the oasis. Unanimity is useful only if there are other checks available (for all I know, others are as morally blind, or as subject to moral hallucination, as I am).
belief in the negative propositions. Further, either formulation appears to be vulnerable to a tu quoque argument. We do, in other cases (the external world; moral values), accept unevidenciable propositions, and so we cannot throw stones at those who do so in religious matters.26

We are now led to a dilemma: in order to give plausibility to Hick's position it seems that we must attribute these arguments to him, and we cannot do so because he explicitly disavows both tu quoque and Jamesian "forced option" sorts of reasoning. We are concerned with truth, and neither our making assumptions in other areas nor the necessity of choosing can give any indication that we will be right should we choose theism.27

It may be objected that I have here left out any reference to the "experiencing-as" aspect of Hick's position. No doubt this should not be done, but it is now becoming difficult to see what the epistemological significance of experiencing-as can be. For if the Jamesian grounds of choice can be stated (with only a bit of caricature) as, "believe whichever makes you feel good," the Hickian-experiential choice can be described with equal accuracy as "believe in accord with what your individual psychological make-up leads you to see." There does not seem to be any more epistemological import to the latter than to the former.28

26 The last two paragraphs roughly parallel the famous dispute between W.K. Clifford and William James (in, respectively, "The Ethics of Belief" and "The Will to Believe." Both essays appear many places, e.g., together in Walter Kaufmann (ed.), Religion from Tolstoy to Camus (New York: Harper, 1961) pp. 201-238.

27 F and K, Chapter 2; Philosophy of Religion, pp. 54-57. Hick's primary objection to tu quoque arguments is that he rejects the assertion that others, e.g., scientists, do make assumptions in the way theists do. The point that we are concerned with truth is stated explicitly only in relation to James, although clearly it also applies to tu quoque arguments.

28 This is not to deny that there may be epistemological significance in how we experience the world. It is to deny that Hick can given an account of this significance in his terms, i.e., terms that involve a sharp distinction between philosophical and other beliefs.
B. Non-provisionality, evidence, and "the circle of faith." The view that if it is possible that evidence could be forthcoming against a proposition or set of propositions, then it is not appropriate to hold them in a non-provisional manner would appear to have the immediate result that it is not appropriate to hold theism non-provisionally. If we grant that nothing resembling the traditional proofs of God's existence can work, there would still be rational considerations of at least four broad types that are relevant: there are questions regarding the internal coherence of God-talk; there are questions concerning the logical possibilities of a relationship between an infinite being and the world of finite things; there are historical questions which appear to have evidential relevance to the truth of any particular theistic religion. (Few are willing to take Tillich's "heroic" line that it would not matter a bit to Christian faith if there were to turn out to be unassailable historical evidence that no such person as Jesus of Nazareth ever existed. Conversely, if unassailable evidence that the resurrection of Jesus did in fact take place, it would seem to count strongly in favor of the truth of Christianity.) And there are ethical questions; if our best ethical evaluations were to be seriously at odds with those implied by theism or some particular theistic religion, then they would count as evidence against it.

Hick, however, maintains that there is only "permissive evidence" for either side of the question. He argues for this by claiming that probability, in either the statistical or confirmation sense, cannot apply to a total interpretation, to the universe taken as a whole, and that both theistic and naturalistic interpretations are logically consistent. Thus neither logical nor empirical considerations can decide the issue.

29 On the probability claim, see, e.g., F and K, pp. 151-156 and "Introduction" to The Existence of God, pp. 7-9. Hick often states that "philosophical considerations are relevant to a decision as to whether or not it is reasonable to believe that God exists," e.g., in God and the Universe of Faiths (London: Macmillan, 1973), pp. 29-33 (this quote is from p. 29). He concludes, however, that the result is that either theism or naturalism is logically consistent and so there is only "permissive evidence both for theism and naturalism" (F and K, p. 162).
These considerations surely are not sufficient to dispose of questions regarding the relevance of evidence. Despite Hick's assurance that theism is a logically consistent alternative, whether it is or not is hardly a closed question. Is "God-talk" internally consistent? (E.g., can the concepts of perfect goodness and power be consistently explicated? Can a notion of non-contingent existence really be stated in a coherent manner?) Can an infinite, perfect being interact with a limited, imperfect world? (E.g., is there a solution to the problem of evil? Is the incarnation a logical possibility?)

Even those who would answer in the affirmative to such questions must know that this answer is not entirely non-problematic; that, for instance, it is not completely obvious that omniscience can be understood in a way that is both "religiously adequate" and logically consistent. The issues involved are of a sufficient degree of logical complexity that new difficulties, new versions of old difficulties, or new problems in current solutions may yet be found. If this is so, then it must be admitted that new "evidence" may be forthcoming and that non-provisionality is not appropriate.

Hick's own position on the problem of evil creates an even more serious problem. He gives massive and very thoughtful consideration to the problem and concludes, "all that we can say is that in spite of the antitheistic evidence the religious claim may nevertheless be true." This is on a par with, "in spite of the failure of my automobile's brakes today, it may still be that the mechanic who was supposed to have fixed

30 Mitchell (The Justification of Religious Belief, Chapter 1 and p. 34), for instance, rejects the claim that the concept of God is incoherent on the basis of some fourteen pages of discussion.

31 This is not an appeal to a generalized skepticism regarding even issues of logical consistency, skepticism of the sort that could be raised only on something like a demon hypothesis. It is an appeal to the historical background of a set of problems and the lack of consensus regarding whether there are solutions or, among those who agree that there are, what they are.

32 This quote is from F and K, p. 158, italics in original. The "massive consideration" of the problem is Evil and the God of Love (Norfolk: Fontana, 1974).
them yesterday is extremely competent and honest." Indeed he may be, but the brake failure is evidence that he is not. Evidence against the truth of a proposition does not cease to be evidence simply because it is not logically incompatible with the proposition, simply because the proposition may be true even though the evidence obtains. Hick knows this ("in spite of the antitheistic evidence..."33), but at the same time he seems to discount the evidence on the ground that the proposition may be true, proceeding with his claim that only "permissive evidence" is possible in the case of theism. This is to try to have it in two ways at once: there is only "permissive evidence" (i.e., there is no counter-evidence); there is counter-evidence but it is not conclusive.

It is, I think, fair to say that Hick simply has no position on the relevance of historical or ethical evidence. The closest he comes to addressing the former is when he maintains that Jesus can be seen either as the Messiah of God or as a self-appointed prophet.34 But either interpretation assumes that there was such a person who lived at a particular time in a particular part of the world, and neither is possible, except as fiction, if this presupposition regarding the historical facts is not made. The question of evidence for or against the presupposition is not addressed.35

Hick is even more silent on the issue of moral evidence, although he perhaps approaches it when, on the basis of his own decent moral convictions regarding the justice of eternal

33"The fact of evil tells against" theism ("Sceptics and Believers," in Faith and the Philosophers, p. 239).

34Philosophy of Religion, p. 62.

35Hick's position here bears some similarity to Kierkegaard's. Kierkegaard argues that the "disciple at first hand" does not have an advantage over the "disciple at second hand" because the crucial fact, that Jesus is the God-man, is not given in experience to either (Philosophical Fragments (Princeton: Princeton U. Press, 1969), Chapters IV and V). Nonetheless, the case is not convincing that the disciple at first hand has no advantage, for he has a knowledge of facts which are necessary but not sufficient conditions for faith and which are not available in anything like the same sense nineteen or twenty centuries later.
torment, he rejects the notion of Hell as traditionally conceived. 36 Those moral convictions count against the words of the New Testament; the "hypothesis" (that the New Testament tells a true story) is saved by revision. Thus, perhaps Hick, in practice, if not in principle, acknowledges the relevance of moral evidence.

In sum, it is Hick's "official" position that there cannot be evidence for or against theism, but he does not show that this is so, and he himself wavers from the position. On his own account of some matters, evidence does seem relevant and, indeed, counter to the truth of theism. But there is nothing in Hick that would explain how it can be rational to hold beliefs in the fact of counterevidence 37 or how it can be rational to hold them in a non-provisional manner if there is even the possibility of counterevidence. There does not appear to be a coherent position here.

There is, perhaps, an explanation of Hick's seeming ambivalence regarding the possibility of evidence. We have already seen that his rejection of its possibility is based on his claim that both theism and naturalism are logically consistent and that probabilities cannot apply to "total interpretations." Still, he says, some theologians have suggested that Christianity can be shown to be more probable using some notion of "alogical probability." Hick replies:

People do indeed cherish such convictions about the universe, and do express them in terms of probability or likelihood. But what they are thus expressing is an individual impression or feeling of "hunch" which cannot be evaluated by any kind of calculus and cannot therefore be imparted as other than a private judgment. It represents the personal response of the whole man to his environment, and is as such outside the sphere of demonstrative reasoning.... In place of the traditional ontological and cosmological demonstrations they [i.e., these theologians] have sought to set up an alternative argument to the effect that, considered as a metaphysical system, the Christian world view is at least as convincing


37 In at least one place he explicitly talks of faith as possible not only in the absence of the possibility of counterevidence. The religious believer has a faith which "is an unshakable dogma, able to absorb and reinterpret all adverse or seemingly contradicting circumstances" (P and K, p. 56).
as any other.... They depict the spiritual, moral, and aesthetic experience of mankind as pointing unmistakably towards theism.

Such a program cannot be successful, says Hick; it is really a matter of "personal persuasion," of "recommendation."

For there are no common scales in which to measure, for example, the evidential weight of apparent universal mechanism against that of the impact of Christ upon his disciples. There is no objective measuring rod by which to compare the depth to which wickedness can sink with the height to which goodness can rise, and so to balance the problem of evil, which challenges theism, against the problem of good, which challenges naturalism....38

When the theist and the atheist argue together, each is trying, by emphasizing this at the expense of that and by drawing this in the center and relegating that to the perimeter, to bring the other to see the universe as he himself sees it. The difference between them is not due to any variation in logical acumen or calculating capacity, but to the difference between two radically different ways of viewing and engaging in the experiences of human life.39

I think that there is much that is right, even importantly right, in this passage. At the same time, there is something of which we should be suspicious. That is the leap from, there is no possibility of demonstration or objective evidence-measuring scales, to, it is then all a matter of persuasion or recommendation. I suggested earlier that from his observation about the consistency of theism and the inapplicability of probabilities to total interpretations, it does not follow that evidence is irrelevant, and I mentioned, e.g., historical and moral evidence. The point was put in such a way as to suggest that Hick simply overlooks the possibility of such evidence.

38 The example is inept. There may be some sense in which the existence of good "challenges naturalism" but it is not the same as the sense in which evil is a problem for the theist. I.e., there is nothing in the naturalist's position that would lead one not to expect good in the world. The problem of evil arises because of specific theistic assumptions (God exists and is omnipotent, omniscient, and wholly good) which leads one to expect that the world would not contain evil.

39 F and K, pp. 155-156.
In the light of the above quotes, this suggestion should perhaps be amended. It is not that he overlooks evidence of a moral or historical nature; he would reject them as evidence because they do not allow for objective probabilistic assessment of the likely truth of various total interpretations. Demonstrable truth, demonstrable inconsistency, and objective probabilities count as evidence. All else is in the camp of "individual impression or feeling of 'hunch'," of persuasion and recommendation.40

And it is this of which we should be suspicious. For, if it is correct, almost all of our decisions and beliefs, whether they be moral, aesthetic, political, practical, or straightforwardly factual, are non-rational (are feelings or hunches), since demonstrations and probabilities in an "objective" (technical) sense notoriously do not apply to even the most mundane of matters. To deny rationality to all such beliefs and decisions flies in the face of both common sense and recent philosophical tradition (in the areas which are most plausibly thought of as "subjective," aesthetics and ethics, the recent philosophical emphasis has been precisely on the role of reasons). Nor will it do for Hick's own purposes since the essence of his position rests on a sharp distinction between total interpretations and other judgments.

In short, we now have a sort of rationale for Hick's apparent ambivalence regarding what would appear to be evidence in regard to theism, but the rationale is neither plausible in itself nor does it fit with other elements in Hick's position in a satisfactory way. Hick's views regarding evidence still fail to form a coherent whole.

40In the same spirit, Hick seems to agree that if the truth of theism cannot be settled by appeal to a "crucial instance," then no evidence at all is possible, and it is all a matter of attitude toward the world (a blik) (F and K, p. 162). This follows immediately his saying again that there is only "permissive evidence" for either theism or naturalism. Thus, evil as non-conclusive counterevidence (it is logically compatible with theism) must be only permissive evidence. I.e., it counts against theism, but not conclusively (is not a crucial instance); therefore it does not count, is not really evidence after all. My suggestion is that Hick gets into such tortured (and incoherent) positions because his "official" doctrine takes evidence in very narrow senses and yet in practice he sensibly recognizes evidence in broader (more realistic) senses.
Finally, there is one other option open to Hick, one which he flirts with but does not actually embrace. The believer, he maintains, operates within "the circle of faith." From within this circle, "external" evidence does not apply. This may call to mind Kierkegaard, who maintains that Christianity is a self-enclosed system and so has its own internal alogical coherence; even the external laws of logic apply to it only insofar as they allow us to see its absurdity when viewed from outside. Or it may lead us to think of D.Z. Phillips who also presents Christianity as a self-enclosed system or "language-game" to which external standards cannot be applied. He does so at the cost of denying that questions of the truth of the system make sense.41

Kai Nielsen and Hick himself have attempted extended criticisms of Phillips. It is not clear that the criticisms draw much blood, since they finally come to little more than saying, "but then Christianity cannot be true!", something overtly present in Phillips' own statement of his case. But it is difficult to know what else could be said. If a view is overtly presented as an absurdity, or as having a result others take to be an absurdity, how does one "draw blood"? "Here is an absurd position which you should accept." "But that position is absurd." "Of course. Why do you think that is an objection?"42


42Kierkegaard brilliantly exploits this feature of his position in the "Appendix" to Ch. III of the Fragments ("The Paradox and the Offended Consciousness"). For a fine discussion
Hick says that the believer "operates within the circle of faith," but he does not deny the relevance of logical consistency nor even, in principle, the relevance of probabilistic considerations (i.e., it is a fact about the nature of probability that it does not apply to total interpretations. Were this not to be the case, theism would not be claimed to be immune to such evidence on the ground that it is a self-enclosed system).

In short, in spite of his remark about "the circle of faith," Hick's essential sensibleness prevents him from taking the implied position to its logical conclusion. He will countenance neither absurdity nor "theism is neither true nor false." The cost of such sensibleness is the lack of coherence regarding the relevance of evidence described above. (Locke, it is often said, was prevented by his common sense from taking his empiricist principles to their logical conclusions, and the cost was inconsistency. It was left to Hume, quite willing to flout common sense, to take Locke's principles to where they indeed lead. Hick, perhaps, is to Locke as Kierkegaard/Phillips is to Hume.)

C. Experience and hypotheses. I see a duck...I see a plot to take over the government...I see modus ponens...I see what is there (if it is there). Hick does not say I see (experience) God. I see events as God's actions in God's world, but I do not see God. God is an entity in addition to what I see. (In Wisdom's parable, I see the garden as a garden tended by a gardener. I do not see the gardener.) Scientific hypotheses often involve entities beyond what we see. The unseen planet


Nielsen's criticisms of Phillips are found in Contemporary Critiques of Religion (London: Macmillan, 1971), Ch. 5; Hick's in God and the Universe of Faiths, Ch. 1 and 2. Far more damaging to Phillips than Nielsen or Hick is Phillips' own reply to Swinburne on the problem of evil ("The Problem of Evil," in Brown, Reason and Religion, pp. 103-122). Phillips' reply is an impassioned and stunningly effective rebuttal from life of simplistic suggestions such as that we individually deserve the evil that befalls us. This is damaging to Phillips' language-game view of religion precisely because the latter is unaffected by the enormity of what on Phillips' account is unjustified evil. Religion is indeed only a language game for Phillips.
is responsible for the odd behavior of the observed one. Bacteria are the unseen cause of plague.

In the cases Hick regards as analogous to the theistic one, if there is an external world that I see, I see the external world. If there are moral values that I experience, I experience moral values. If there is a God, I experience...God? No. God's actions. There is a lack of parallel; the theistic case parallels the cases of scientific inference. Hick's theist claims to have a perceptual belief that a being exists without experiencing that being.43

If I do not experience the being, is it not an inferred entity? Its existence an hypothesis? The answer, I think, is yes...and no. Hick, with his sharp dichotomy between perceptual beliefs and inferential beliefs (hypotheses), can only say, yes, although he, in fact, says no.

This creates two problems for Hick: first, hypotheses, on his own account, must be held provisionally. Second, again on his own account, there are no facts which theism is required to explain, and so if God's existence is an hypothesis, it is an hypothesis which explains nothing.

D. Faith and knowledge. Hick wishes to assimilate theistic belief to "all our knowing,"44 and yet he in fact assimilates it to only two specific instances: our beliefs in the realm of moral values and in the existence of the external world. The first case is of dubious worth as a case of knowledge or even belief, since neither "cognitive intuitionism" nor naturalism enjoys much popularity today, forms of (highly modified) emotivism (e.g., Hare's meta-ethics) seeming more plausible to most. The existence of the external world is, on the other hand, often said to be a presupposition of language (or, at least, of our language) and so not a matter of interpretation at

43The cameraman in Hick's movie set analogy is also an additional unseen entity; thus, the unintended aptness of the movie set analogy specifically to the case of theism (see earlier note 6). Hick seems somewhat aware of the problem of "God as additional entity" and tries to counter it, not, however, very successfully (F and K, pp. 141-2, 145-6).

44F and K, p. 97.
all, i.e., not something for which there is a logically possible alternative. Others hold that such "metaphysical" questions are simply not cognitive questions at all.

There is yet another position in relation to the external world, i.e., that the question of its existence is a genuinely cognitive one that can coherently be raised (e.g., it is a meaningful possibility that a demon is deceiving me into believing it exists or that my life is a dream). But once this is granted, all of our experiences are compatible with the skeptical side of the issue. The proposition, "there is an external world," is genuinely unevidenceable.

The foregoing paragraph actually represents Hick's position in regard to the existence of the external world. The conclusion would seem to be that we are plunged into a dungeon of skepticism from which there is no rational escape. Hick, remarkably, concludes that we do have knowledge that there is an external world, since, in fact, the character of our experience produces certainty in perceivers that that experience is of an external world. He achieves this result by construing knowledge in such a way that subjective certainty that a proposition is true, combined with the actual truth of that proposition, is sufficient for knowledge. We have knowledge of that which is unevidenceable. Indeed, a remarkable conclusion.

In sum, first, merely by presenting theism as a total interpretation, Hick makes it impossible to make the claim that he does make, that belief in its truth conforms to the pattern of all of our knowing. Most of our knowledge claims do not involve (unevidenceable) total interpretations. Second, one may doubt that there are even any other cases of total interpretations which are genuinely analogous to the case of theism (the external world "belief" may be a presupposition of language). Third, insofar as the case of the external world really is analogous to the theism case (is a genuine question), it is doubtful that a belief in its existence meets acceptable

45Mitchell (The Justification of Religious Belief, pp. 108-109) and Preller (Divine Science and the Science of God, pp. 202-203) both give such a criticism.

46F and K, Ch. 9
criteria for being knowledge. As a purported case of knowledge, theism seems to be left alone, neither analogous to clear instances of knowledge nor confirming to its criteria.

E. Meaning, evidence, and verification. Hick's position on the intellectual respectability of faith depends on the unevidenceable character of theism. If evidence is possible, we should believe on the basis of evidence (or its lack). His position on the meaningfulness of the object of faith depends on it being verifiable. Since whatever is verifiable is evidenceable (I imagine this is analytic), we seem to have a contradiction.

Clearly, there is a reply. Theism is unevidenceable from the perspective of this life; it is verifiable in another life. In this life it is intellectually respectable to believe without evidence, since by the time we can get the evidence, it will be too late to reach a decision. But this suggests an extension of the principle regarding what it is rational to believe: instead of, it is rational to believe in the absence of evidence if evidence is impossible by the nature of the case, we would seem to have something like, it is rational to believe in the absence of evidence if evidence will not be forthcoming in time to allow us to make a useful decision. This would justify us believing, among others, any proposition whose truth value is unlikely to be determined by evidence in our lifetime. Such a principle is not one which Hick, or anyone else who sees the avoidance of error (of gullibility) as a value, would want to embrace.

The existence of the external world and the realm of moral values are accepted as total interpretations, analogous to the acceptance of theism, Hick tells us. For the analogies to hold, the first two must be cognitive; it must be a matter of belief whether they exist. And yet neither the existence of the external world nor of moral values is verifiable (unless, incredibly, it be in an afterlife). This sort of problem is compounded by the case of the Old Testament prophets whose theism did not include belief in an afterlife. Their beliefs were not subject to verification, and yet Hick counts them among the paradigm cases of theistic faith.47 Thus, Hick is willing

47F and K, pp. 193-4. The case could become very peculiar. One might say that the prophets' belief in theism was meaningful because it was verifiable (in the afterlife) even though the prophets did not believe they were verifiable. Hick, however, does not seem to mean anything like this and so discussion of the peculiarities of such a position can be avoided.
to allow, even require, the cognitive significance of some beliefs which are not verifiable (without directly acknowledging that he is doing so in the cases of moral values and the external world; in the case of the Old Testament prophets he does so rather explicitly).

Again, it appears there is an inconsistency in Hick's position (verifiability is a necessary condition of meaningfulness and some non-verifiable beliefs are meaningful). One wonders why Hick does not follow his basic intuitions that there are some non-verifiable beliefs, rather than succumbing to the demand for verification, which is contrary to his basic position on the unevideedenceable character of theism. (This is a particularly acute problem given that Hick says that "although this does not affect the logic of the situation, it should be noted that the alternative interpretations are more than theoretical in that they render different practical plans and policies appropriate now." Why does this make no difference to the logic of the situation? If it looks like a duck, walks like a duck, and quacks like a duck, it probably is a duck. Hick should say that the "propositions" of theism look like propositions, have been taken for centuries to be propositions, and make a practical difference in one's present life, and so they are propositions.)

IV

If one looks for an analogue to the basic elements of Hick's position in recent epistemology, one finds it in Rudolf Carnap. In "Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology," Carnap draws a fundamental distinction between two types of questions concerning the existence or reality of entities. If someone wishes to speak in his language about a new kind of entities, he has to introduce a system of new ways of speaking, subject to new rules; we shall call this procedure the construction of a framework for the new entities in question. And now we must distinguish two

48F and K, p. 178.

49I have not here discussed the question of whether theism can be verified in an afterlife. (There is now a large body of literature on the question.) My concern has been exclusively with whether it need be verifiable at all in order to be meaningful.
kinds of questions of existence: first, questions of the existence of certain entities of the new kind within the framework; we call them **internal questions**: and second, questions concerning the existence or reality of the framework itself, called **external questions**.\(^{50}\)

Carnap gives several examples to illustrate this distinction. For instance, there is the framework of observable spatio-temporal objects. If we accept this framework, then internal questions can be raised, "'Is there a piece of white paper on my desk?','...'Are unicorns and centaurs real or merely imaginary?'..." We answer such questions by conducting certain empirical investigations; just what these investigations will involve is specified by the rules which were incorporated in the framework along with the new ways of speaking. If, in regard to some object, the rules are satisfied, it is said to be real. These internal questions which can be settled by definite methods (empirical methods in this case) are **cognitive questions**.

External questions are "philosophers' questions." Here the question is the one of "the reality of the thing world itself," but it is not a genuine question. "Realists give an affirmative answer, subjective idealists a negative one, and the controversy goes on for centuries without ever being solved. And it cannot be solved because it is framed in the wrong way. To be real in the scientific sense means to be an element of the framework; hence this concept cannot be applied to the framework itself."\(^{51}\) There are "pragmatic" criteria which are of help in answering external questions; "the efficiency, fruitfulness, and simplicity of the use of the thing language may be among the decisive factors."\(^{52}\) Nonetheless, the criteria do not dictate an answer; a decision is necessary.\(^{53}\) Because of this, accepting (or rejecting) the thing language is not a cognitive matter. The question is a "pseudo-question."\(^{54}\)

\(^{50}\) *Revue internationale de Philosophie* (Vol. 11, 1950), pp. 21-22.

\(^{51}\) Carnap, pp. 22-23.

\(^{52}\) Carnap, p. 23.

\(^{53}\) Carnap, pp. 23, 29.

\(^{54}\) Carnap, p. 25.
Similar considerations apply if the question is one of the acceptance of the framework of the system of numbers. The significant difference is that for the internal questions of this system "the answers are found, not by empirical investigation based on observations, but by logical analysis based on the rules for the new expressions. Therefore, the answers are here analytic, i.e., logically true." In the case of any framework, there are strict rules which dictate the answers to the cognitive internal questions; there are only pragmatic considerations to guide us in reaching decisions regarding the external pseudo-questions. The former are then verifiable; the latter not.

Hick is clearly in agreement with the basics of the Carnapian position. He has the rigid distinction between internal and external questions ("total interpretations" are answers to external questions). Science is understood as a set of internal questions, each answer neatly verifiable by empirical methods and so subject to revision at any moment in the light of new evidence. External questions are non-cognitive ("fixed up" by Hick by the clumsy device of eschatological verification). Even Hick's ambiguity regarding the possibility of reasons for (or against) external statements is in Carnap. External questions are answered by decision, not evidence, but there are many things to be considered for and against a given answer ("pragmatic considerations").

When Hick invokes the notion of eschatological verification, it is obvious that he is assuming the positivistic position regarding the necessity of verification for meaningfulness. This appears at first to be an aberration in his account, a gratuitous and isolated reversion to a now old-fashioned set of dogmas. The present point is that it is not an isolated element at all. Hick's epistemological assumptions are consistently those of Carnap, the complete positivist.

The fundamental difficulty with Hick's position should now be apparent. It is that he accepts so many positivistic assumptions that he has no hope of showing that theism is meaningful and intellectually respectable. The positivists' aim was to show that only science--each statement of which they construed as empirical/verifiable--has meaning. Morality, aesthetics, religion lack cognitive significance. The defender of religion (or aesthetics or morality) must then show that religion is like science, in which case it turns out to be a "poor man's science," falsifiable and falsified ("the more virtuous your life, the better your crops will grow"), to be believed only by the superstitious. Or he must admit that it is unlike science and so without cognitive significance. Or he must reject the positivistic account of knowledge.

^Carnap, p. 24

Hick does none of these. Instead, he accepts a Carnapian epistemology and attempts to piece together various of its elements so that theism turns out to be unlike...and yet like...science. The results are described above. He set himself the task of showing how, on positivistic principles, theism could be cognitively meaningful, intellectually respectable, and yet utterly unlike science. It was an heroic task. The wonder is not that he failed but that he attempted it.

It is something of a truism today that positivistic accounts of scientific knowledge, and so of knowledge in general, have been superseded by other accounts. There is far less agreement as to just what the correct account is. In broadest outline, many would agree on at least this much:\(^5\)

The positivists' most basic mistake was in thinking that individual statements are tested against "the facts" in a piecemeal way and therefore that it makes sense to speak of "the meaning" of individual statements in terms of those facts and in isolation from the system of statements of which each is a part. Instead, knowledge is a "seamless web"; the meaning of an individual statement (insofar as it makes sense

\(^5\)What follows should not be taken to be precisely any one person's view (if nothing else, it is too schematically presented for that). Elements of the view presented here can be found in the writings of Hanson, W.V.O. Quine, H. Putnam, P.K. Feyerabend, I. Lakatos, and, of course, Kuhn. This is not to say that they agree with one another in any amount of detail or even each with himself over a span of a few years. However, considered in relation to the positivistic tradition that they all reject (and which Hick accepts), the differences, however real and important, appear to be of no more significance than do those between Marx and Engels to the capitalist or between Luther and Calvin to the atheist. For recent comparisons, overviews, and new contributions, see Larry Laudan, Progress and Its Problems: Towards a Theory of Scientific Growth (Berkeley: U. of California Press, 1977) and Frederick Suppe (ed., but with lengthy "Introduction" and "Afterword"), The Structure of Scientific Theories, 2nd ed. (Urbana: U. of Illinois Press, 1977).
to talk about "the meaning") is determined by its place in
the system. The system as a whole confronts experience only
along its "edges." When experience presents an anomaly for
the system, e.g., when the moon is observed as being not quite
where it should be for the Ptolemaic astronomer, an adjustment
may be made anywhere in the system: an epicycle could be
added, the notion of the necessity of only circular motion
could be amended, or heliocentrism could be given up. One
could also reject the accuracy of the observation, or, as a
last resort, amend the laws of arithmetic or logic. Any
statement is in principle revisable. Decisions as to what
course to take are based on pragmatic considerations.

Even though any statement is in principle open to
revision, those furthest from "the experiential periphery"
are least likely to be revised.58 "There are many, many
principles--we might broadly classify them as "framework
principles"--which have the characteristic of being so central
that they are employed as auxiliaries to make predictions in
an overwhelming number of experiments, without themselves
being jeopardized by any possible experimental results. This
is the classical role of laws of logic; but it is equally the
role of certain physical principles, e.g., 'f=ma,' and...the
laws of Euclidean geometry, and the law 'e=1/2mv^2,' at the
time when those laws were still accepted.59 These basic
"framework" principles (let us call these "paradigms"60) are
not regarded as being tested by experience. They are held as
immune to refutation. To give these up is to give up a system,
and to give up a system, which otherwise works well, on
account of some deviant observations, would be irrational.

58To here, the exposition is essentially in Quine's terms
as presented in "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," in From a Logical

59Putnam, "The Analytic and the Synthetic," in Herbert Feigl
and Grover Maxwell (eds.), Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy
of Science: Vol. III (Minneapolis: U. of Minnesota Press,

60Kuhn sometimes uses "paradigms" to refer to such basic
theories. Notoriously, he also uses the term in other ways
(see Margaret Masterman, "The Nature of a Paradigm," in
I. Lakatos and A. Musgrave (eds.), Criticism and the Growth
of Knowledge (Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press, 1970),
pp. 59-90.
There are two additional crucial factors in this sort of view of science: first, all systems are, at anytime, confronted with some anomalies and unsolved problems. None can be regarded as "perfected." Second, what one observes, what the facts are, is largely determined by what theories one holds. While there is a sense in which Tycho and Kepler observe the "same thing," in a more important sense they see different things. Tycho sees the sun rise; Kepler sees the sun disappearing as the earth turns. For Tycho, "the fact" is that the sun is rising; for Kepler, "the fact" is that the sun is disappearing as the earth turns. Since one sees in terms of one's theories, one's theories determine the facts: there are no "neutral facts" to make it possible for a "neutral observer" to choose between rival theories on the basis of "the facts."¹⁶¹

These considerations would seem to make any system (paradigm) immune to change. And yet clearly none is immune. Aristotelean physics gave way to Newtonian and Newtonian to Einsteinian. Ptolemaic astronomy gave way to Copernican. It is impossible to give a specific description of how system change comes about precisely because it is not rule-governed (since it is the rules, the basic principles, which are in question, it cannot be). It is clear, however, that the mere presence of anomaly is not sufficient (since anomaly is always present). A minimal necessary condition of change is the existence of a promising alternative. The alternative need not give more correct answers or even be more simple; its very newness, combined with a sense that the old system has had its chance, may be a decisive consideration.

What other factors are important will vary from case to case. Considerations of simplicity, elegance, and comprehensiveness may make a difference. "Fit" with other sciences, aesthetic factors, even social, ethical, and religious considerations may all matter.⁶² There are no questions of "probability" here.

¹⁶¹On "observation," see, as noted earlier, Hanson, Patterns of Discovery, Chapter I. On "facts," see Hanson's Chapter II. That both are theory-laden also plays an important role in Kuhn's view of science (Structure of Scientific Revolutions, passim).

⁶²Such factors certainly were important in the Copernican Revolution (see Kuhn's book of that title (New York: Random House, 1959). Laudan also emphasizes the importance of "extra-scientific" factors in Progress and Its Problems. (Kuhn, on the other hand, in later works often says that decisions are made within a tightly-knit scientific community whose members only care about "purely scientific" considerations.)
There is only a question of which system seems to "make more sense" of the world. The issue is decided, the shift is completed, when enough scientists are "converted," undergo a "vision shift," and begin to see, believe, and work within the framework.

If Hick's views are reconsidered in the light of this sort of view of the scientific enterprise, the central difference that is made is that he can emphasize, not how unlike religion is to science, but how epistemologically like the two are. While such a position requires considerable reformulation of many of the details of Hick's position, it does, I think, maintain his central insights: religiously, the phenomenon of a "living faith" is more than merely a matter of belief or of belief-with-good-works or of belief-with-appropriate attitudes. It is a matter of one's over-all experience of the world and beliefs that that is the way things are. Epistemologically, the question of the existence of God is not a question on the level of those concerning the existence of unicorns, cows, pi mesons or Santa Claus. It is not a question

63 There is a long history of claims that religion is "like science." For the most part these are naive and uninteresting. Recent interesting claims to this effect are Mitchell's in The Justification of Religious Belief, John F. Miller III's in "Science and Religion: Their Logical Similarity" (Religious Studies, Vol. 5, 1969), and Ian G. Barbour's in Myths, Models, and Paradigms (New York: Harper and Row, 1974). The "Kuhnian" view of science, with its talk of scientific "conversion," etc. invites comparisons between religion and science (although, remarkably, Miller's case is not couched in Kuhnian terms). Also, while there are few things in this world more boring than Ph.D. dissertations and one of the more boring things is a reference to one's own dissertation, perhaps the reader will give me leave to mention just once (what I have not mentioned in twelve years) that the first attempt that I know of to develop a Kuhnian view of religious "knowledge" is my own dissertation, Religious Faith: Some Contemporary Views, 1967 (on deposit in Firestone Library, Princeton University and available from University Microfilms, Inc., Ann Arbor, Michigan).

Notice that the point of Section V of the present paper is not primarily that such similarities can be shown (this has now been done); it is that Hick's position can finally be made out only in terms of scientific and religious similarity.
that can be answered by rule-governed procedures; instead, the belief is a basic, "system-forming" one that itself determines the rules for subsidiary beliefs. How one sees the world is indeed the basic epistemological criterion of justified belief in matters of this sort. "Matters of this sort," however, now include not only such beliefs as "there is an external world," but also basic propositions which are clearly cognitive, scientific and rationally held. As a result, it can, for the first time, be argued plausibly that our knowledge of God (if there is such) really does conform to the pattern of all of our knowing.

Not only are Hick's insights maintained; the criticisms given above are overcome. While those criticisms were not made from the perspective of this sort of philosophy of science and do not depend on it, with this view of science they fall away, almost as if by a bit of sleight of hand. First, the reasonableness of theism does not depend on a tu quoque ("what I do is bad but no worse than what you do"); nor is it just a psychological fact of doubtful epistemological import that one sees the world in the way one does. How one sees is influenced but not coerced by non-rule-governed but "evidential" considerations. These considerations involve not just "framework" principles considered in isolation, but such principles in relation to their possible implications for all other beliefs. How one sees is the final non-arbitrary arbiter of belief. This is a situation which is typical of genuine cases of knowledge of broad issues. Second, the distinction between inferential and perceptual belief is no longer clear-cut; one trivially infers to God's existence because one perceives God's actions and one perceives God's actions because one believes that God exists and acts in the world. Since the question is whether the skeptical or theistic world view makes

64 There is a danger of appearing to draw an absolute distinction between framework principles (paradigms) and "internal" statements. There is no absolute distinction. Some principles are more general than others, play a role in a larger number of beliefs; they are more "system-forming." Thus, they tend to be held inviolate and to "set the rules" for "subsidiary" beliefs. One could hold belief in Santa Claus to be inviolate (cf. flat-earthers) but to do so would disrupt so much else of what we believe to do so would be extremely unwise.

65 We can see why the notion of a blik is one we can well do without. A blik is simply a central element in an overall conceptual scheme.
more sense of the world, over-all, which elements within each are inferred (unseen) and which are perceptual becomes a question of little interest. Third, the clumsy ad hoc device of eschatological verification is clearly superfluous. Different scientific systems are different ways of understanding the world. There are no "crucial experiments" which adjudicate between them (much less are there crucial experiments which would verify or falsify one system in isolation from others). It cannot be necessary for a religious system to meet supposedly scientific demands that scientific systems do not meet, cannot meet, and have no need to meet. Fourth, the presumption of irrationality (because of "difficulties") is dissipated. Consider, for instance, Findlay's famous "disproof" of God's existence. It is, of course, both legitimate and important to point out conceptual problems with theism. Findlay's mistake lies in thinking that such a problem, even if unanswerable, would constitute a disproof. There are anomalies in relation to every system; none can be overthrown just because of an anomaly.66

Finally there is the issue of non-provisionality. Perhaps if even non-coercive evidence is relevant, then a belief ought to be tentatively held. The primary point in this regard has been given above. Scientists hold to the basics of their systems in a non-provisional manner (they do not stand ready to discard a paradigm upon the appearance of anomaly), and it is clearly appropriate that they should do so (it would be irrational just to give up an otherwise well-functioning

66J.N. Findlay, "Can God's Existence Be Disproved?", in Flew and MacIntyre, Problems in Philosophical Theology. There are, of course, a number of difficult issues here regarding different sorts of anomaly. A faith that purports to be rational cannot actually be incoherent in the way that Findlay charges theism is. But the believer can take it that it is an apparent incoherence which results from the inadequacy of our understanding of God's nature. He can cite, as an analogy, science conceiving of light as wave movements and, incompatibly, as particle movements. Each can be treated as a problem to be resolved, although the religious problem may not be thought to be humanly resolvable in this life. (The light analogy to religious paradox is discussed by Ronald Hepburn in Christianity and Paradox (London: Watts, 1958), Ch. Two.)

Findlay has since disavowed his argument (Ascent to the Absolute (London: Allen and Unwin, 1970), p. 91). This does not affect my point which is that even if the argument is unanswerable, it would not constitute a disproof. (Nor does it seem particularly significant for the merits of the argument that Findlay has disavowed it. There is even less reason to think that the originator of an argument is the final arbiter of its soundness than there is to think that the originator of a poem is the final arbiter of its meaning.)
VI

The "Hick-revised" defense of faith shows that theistic belief is not subject to certain sorts of objections: it cannot straightforwardly be shown to be false, on a par with belief in Santa Claus or the Tooth Fairy. No number of observations of chimneys or pillows will show the non-existence of God. It need not be irrational to hold to a belief in the face of actual anomalies (including logical difficulties). It may not even be irrational to hold a belief in such a way that it is immune to any possible counter-evidence. And a genuine belief need not be verifiable in order to be meaningful. In all of this it is like the "framework principles" ("paradigms") of scientific systems. In the final analysis, how one sees the world largely determines how one believes about the world. We might say that, on this account, there is nothing in principle wrong with theism. It is not that theism is the wrong sort of thing to be a candidate for rational belief.

67 In spite of what is said here about the non-provisionality of scientific beliefs, it is difficult to escape the suspicion that the religious believer holds to his beliefs in a way that is significantly different from the way in which a scientist holds to his. I hold this suspicion, but I do not know how to explicate it in a satisfactory way.

One might point out that the scientist knows that it is possible that he could change his views at some later time. But everyone, even the religious believer, knows that about any belief. If the knowledge of that bare possibility is sufficient to produce provisionality, then non-provisionality does not appear to be a possibility at all. (But such knowledge does not actually seem sufficient for non-provisionality, since it is compatible with a resolve never to change one's mind and absolute confidence that one never will.)

Perhaps a difference is that we think the religious believer is willing to tolerate a greater degree of anomaly than is the scientist. This comes to saying that the religious person is likely to be somewhat more stubborn than the scientist. But since we cannot say, in general, when stubbornness becomes irrationality even in science (cf. Kuhn on Priestley, Structure, p. 159), there seems no crucial difference here.

Clearly there is more that needs doing here. (Mitchell discusses some aspects of the topic, at times very acutely, in The Justification of Religious Belief, ch. 7 and 8.)
From Hume and Kant to the logical positivists and on to the authors in the Flew and MacIntyre volume, philosophical objections to theism have predominantly taken the form of arguing that theism is indeed the wrong sort of thing to be a candidate for rational belief. If this is not true, then it may seem but a short step to the position that theism is "like science," and so it is a "state which it is rational to be in...." But it is not a short step. It is not a step at all. From the fact that theism is the sort of thing that can be a rational belief, from the fact that it is "structurally" like science, there is no presumption that it is rationally believable.

Thus a case must be made that theism is a framework which it is rational to embrace. Since there are no "principles of evidence," both the theist and the skeptic must try to make a "cumulative case,"68 where this involves bringing to bear all potentially persuasive considerations on either side in the hope of effecting a "vision shift" on the part of the other. Each must try to get the other to see that his own way of understanding the world makes more sense of things. This is correct, as far as it goes, but it leaves out crucial considerations.

A framework principle is one that is held immune to change. It is reasonable to hold a principle in this way if it enters into so many of our other beliefs that its revision would require a massive disruption of an effective belief system, and if there is no promising alternative to that system.

There was a time when theism clearly had this status. An educated European man in the fourteenth century could not seriously countenance abandoning Christianity because to do so would be disruptive of his interlocking principles of physics, astronomy, ethics, and social life. Nor was there a viable alternative to this Aristotelean, Ptolemaic, theistic world view. It is difficult to see how a case could be made that theism has this sort of status today. Not physics, not astronomy, not social principles, not even ethics depends on religion today. It is not really that there are now alternatives to theism which could be adopted. It is that alternatives have already been adopted. The content and methods of a science which has no need for God pervade our thinking. Our ethics and politics are secular. Our aspirations are more

68The phrase is Mitchell's as in the over-all position of this paragraph (Mitchell, Justification..., Part II). Here again, Mitchell's argument is lengthy and often interesting and helpful.
likely to be financial or sexual than religious. If there are specifically theistic elements in our lives, they are "added on," one morning a week addenda to our otherwise independent lives. When a believer gives up theism today, theism is given up. The bulk of his beliefs, goals, and attitudes is unaffected. 69

The preceding paragraph could be characterized as a collection of cliches; or it could be characterized as a summary of the major theme of twentieth century theology. For recent theologians have been predominantly concerned with the question of the relevance of theism for a scientific/ secular world. The theological problem is, however, often thought of as only one of relevance, of how to get more people to take an interest in theism when its traditional roles have been preempted. What I am suggesting is that relevance is an epistemological criterion. For once theism is divorced from the other parts of our lives, giving it up does not threaten to disrupt enough else to make it reasonable to cling to it in the face of the difficulties maintaining it involves.

A learned Medieval man could, in his own time, make a cumulative case for or against theism that would differ only in detail from the cases that could be made today, if the issues are restricted to theism itself (e.g., to the plausibility of the proofs or the possibility of understanding God's nature. The Medievals were no less aware than the Flew and MacIntyre authors of the problems in talking about God.) What has changed is the context of the debate, the relationship between theism and the rest of our lives. It is the context that is crucial. 70


70 The contentions of this paragraph are particularly close to MacIntyre's in "Is Understanding Religion Compatible with Believing?", pp. 127-133. I go beyond MacIntyre only in the application of such considerations to the sort of view of religious faith outlined above; i.e., the latter makes clear how the apparently "sociological" considerations become epistemological ones.
Theists resist (of course) the suggestion that their beliefs are on the level of belief in Santa Claus, even though both beliefs, admittedly, lack evidence in their favor. Hick has some insights into the differences between the two cases. The "Hick revised" view avoids the problems of Hick's formulations, but it points up the apparent situation of theism in today's world. It is a system of dubious relevance to any other part of our lives, and it is one which is fraught with internal difficulties. The latter was known to the Medievals. The former was not true for them. Its contemporary truth is the crucial, and negative, epistemological consideration regarding theism today. The conversion of the practical issue of relevance into the crucial epistemological issue is the outcome of understanding theistic faith as cognitive and unlike belief in Santa Claus.

And yet, on my account, it is finally a matter of how one "sees" the world, and many today believe that they see the world theistically. By Descartes' time, there were still those who saw the world in Aristotelean terms. They were not demonstrably wrong and in no obvious sense were they irrational. But they were wrong. They had held to a set of beliefs too long, and they mistook the words of a once viable world-view for a viable world-view. Belief in God in the latter part of the twentieth century has every appearance of being like belief in Aristotelian physics in the middle of the seventeenth century.