ABSTRACT. Accounts of theistic faith according to which it does not involve referring to or believing in God as existing independently of the life of faith are instances of theistic reductionism. Theistic reductionism, in holding that 'God' does not refer to reality outside the life of believers, holds thereby that theism is not rightly to be regarded as true or false. Such accounts may be proposed or used as defenses of theistic faith. They 'defend' faith insofar as they describe the form of life faith involves and show that the human and cultural functions it performs are valuable. Examining several reductionist accounts, ordered from weaker to stronger, I argue that they fail as defenses of theistic life and language. Whereas the reductionist views claim to leave the practice of theism as it is, I argue that in fact they imply a different form of life from the one theism actually is. Thus reductionist defenses of religious practice fail and fail precisely where they insist on treating God in some way other than as existing outside of religious life. From this I infer that theism as it exists can only be defended in ways that include taking 'God' as referring to a God who is real outside the life which recognizes him. The religious reductionists discussed include R.B. Braithwaite, P.F. Schmidt, Paul Holmer, Paul van Buren, Gordon Kaufman, and D.Z. Phillips.

Theistic reductionism or religious reductionism has become a common position for philosophers interested in defending theistic religion. The defining mark of religious reductionism is the thesis that participation in the theistic religions, especially Christianity and Judaism, does not involve believing that God exists independently of the religious life in which he is acknowledged, i.e., does not involve believing that faith in God is true or false. Along with this claim goes the idea that religions are complex forms of life organized by language systems and having certain practical cultural functions, rather than explanatory...
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Theories about the fundamental things that there are. Thus religious reductionism removes the need to justify the belief that God exists. It defends theism by describing the form of life it is and the human and cultural functions it performs. Thus, reductionism in religion claims to remove a long-standing confusion about religious faith and thereby to leave theism as it is and believers free to get on with practicing their faith. Some of the philosophers who, in their different ways, are religious reductionists, are R.B. Braithwaite, R.M. Hare, P.F. Schmidt, Paul Holmer, Paul van Buren, D.Z. Phillips, and Gordon Kaufman.

I shall argue that reductionist defenses of theism fail. They claim to leave the practice of theism as it is, but in fact their accounts of the meaning and role of 'God' in theistic practice imply a different form of life from the theism they defend. If their understanding of the nature of theistic life were understood, believed, and integrated into life, it would interfere with the very practices which it claims to be defending. From the failure of theistic reductionism to be only descriptive, we can infer that the belief in the existence of God as an independently existing individual is after all a necessary part of the actual practice of theism.

Since the religious reductionists claim to tell us what faith really is and to leave everything in faith as it is (except, it must be, for the removal of some confusion), our strategy will be to consider the different types of theistic reductionism to see where their claims fail. To succeed, a reductionist defense would have to give such an account of theism as to include the essential elements, the concepts and basic forms and practices through which it is lived, and to show that none of these involves the belief that God exists externally to religious life. To test the success of any such account we must ask whether a theist could continue in the practice of his faith if he accepted the account as true and sought to make the practice of his religion consistent with the reductionist understanding of it. If the position of religious reductionism can be accepted without requiring the elimination of any essential part of faith's practice, then the account succeeds as a defense of theism. If, on the other hand, acceptance by a believer would require such change in the life of faith as to make it no longer recognizable as a theistic life, then the account fails both as an accurate account and as a defense.

To engage at all in this kind of examination of reductionist accounts of theism requires facing the troublesome issue of what is the common form of theistic life. The very idea of defending theistic faith requires it. For unless there can be at least some general agreement on what defines life as theistic life, there can hardly be any quarrel over whether an account of it allows it to continue as what it was or leads to a modification that makes it quite a differ-
The most general form of action that organizes life as theistic life is the form of devotion to and communion with God. That is, the form of theistic practice is prayer, prayer in the broad sense of interpersonal action in which the worshiper acknowledges the unconditional primacy of God. As a participant in his religion, the believer takes its ritual or worship form, both public and private, seriously. The more seriously he takes them, the more fully he practices his religion. They are the very forms through which the life of faith is able to exist. We can see what they essentially are by looking at the liturgies. Whether the liturgy be for daily prayers, passover, communion, baptism, marriage, or burial it is a form of devoted communion with God: hymns of praise, confession, petition and thanksgiving in which the worshiper addresses himself to God, makes himself humble before God, attempts to understand the word and will of God, renew his commitment to God, refers all things to judgement by God's will, and rejoices in the assurance of God's gracious help. Nor is it any different for non-liturgical groups; they may lack the standard liturgical forms, prayers, and responses, but they worship within the same interpersonal structure of devotion or prayer. What is important is that full participation in such worship requires that the worshiper give himself to the form, that for at least the separate time of worship he put off being a sceptical observer and enter into the acts of prayer. Even if one feels doubt about it, to the extent that one does participate in the acts, one thereby enters into and lives by that form of communication with God. (Few would dispute that there are degrees of participation.) These addresses made to God and the waiting to receive God's responses are (and the point is of the utmost importance) in the form of personal communication. Devotion and prayer are personal in form; they are acts performed in the mode of personal interaction. Furthermore, they extend to include the whole of life. The prayer of the theist aims at bringing all actions into it so that all is done in devotion to God.

In saying that theistic life is interpersonal I am not saying that for theism God is a person in the same way that human beings are persons. That God's personal being is personal in a unique sense has been emphasized by classical
theologians even from the time of the prophets of ancient Israel. The practice of theism recognizes the metaphorical or analogical character of God's personal being. The important point, however, is that theistic life cannot dispense with the interpersonal mode of conceiving God and acting in relation to God. The metaphor of God as person is not one among a variety of metaphors which can be used or not used as one sees fit—not if one is to practice faith in God. It is the very form through which the theistic life is lived, a lived analogy.

We shall see later that the interpersonal form of faith involves the conception of God as a reality active in the highest degree, existing independently in the sense of being the source of his own actions and so able to enter into a relation with his worshipers in which he responds on the basis of his own 'mind' and 'will'. But for now, in order not to load the guns against religious reductionism, we take only the most general concept involved in a life by prayer or personal communion with God, viz. the concept of God as that reality in relation to which the appropriate life is the life of interpersonal devotion or prayer. If there is any form of religious reductionism the acceptance of which is consistent with the life described, then theism would thereby be defended and the belief that God exists independently of the religious life form would be established as unnecessary to theistic practice.

Some may object to such a characterization of the most general form of theistic life on the grounds that it takes the trappings of ritual as the crux of faith. The 'real' or 'true' life of faith will be said to lie in the practice of selfless love for others, especially for those others who are poor, powerless and downtrodden. It may be said, appealing, for example, to Dietrich Bonhoeffer's idea of "religionless Christianity" (but wrongly appealing, I think), that taking ritual as the basic form of faith is a vicious falsification of faith, a legalizing of theism, and an invitation to substitute that which provides satisfaction and security for the unconditional commitment that the true faith calls for. This being so, the idea that the basic form of theistic worship is prayer is vitiated. But the criticism would be missing the point. I do not deny that one could substitute ritual celebrations for real faith or that it is contrary to the faith to turn it into mere ritual practice. But the appeal to the form of theistic worship was not to say that theistic life is exhausted by the legalistic performance of the rites as a means of security. So to perform them would put one in bad faith, like the person who goes through the motions of communicating with others while actually withholding himself and putting up a false front. The appeal to ritual form was to say that the form of theistic worship discloses the form and ideal of the whole theistic life. One can participate hypocritically in ritual, it is true, but, the believer will say, there is
also a faithful participation in which one does not simply use the personal form for one's own ends but aims at extending the communion with God it involves into every part of life. Ritual expresses the ideal for the whole of life: it is so to extend relation to God as to submit all to God's will, depend in all upon God's help, and rest in all upon God's grace. Thus, for the believer liturgy shows and begins to make real what life should be. And now that we have stated a position on the essence or most general form common to the various modes of theism, we can consider some of the accounts given by religious reductionists.

I have ordered the different versions of theistic reductionism from the weaker to stronger, beginning, that is, with those which I think offer less effective description of the essentials of theism and moving to those which I think offer the most effective account.

The first and the weakest account of theism is the moral account. Its most widely cited proponent is R.B. Braithwaite. P.F. Schmidt and Paul Holmer have supported similar views, and there are others who seem to go beyond it but who would nevertheless include it as part of the truth. It is the most familiar form of religious reductionism, so I shall discuss it only briefly. It is in its simplest terms the view that the whole meaning of theism is in expressing and promoting a certain mode of moral behavior, behavior supposed to be good for the individual and for society. For Braithwaite it is the religious stories that are singled out as crucial: they imaginatively express and promote the intention to behave according to their "moral." In Schmidt's account, religious literature and practice aim at developing certain attitudes toward life consisting mainly of dispositions to act one way rather than another in certain types of situations. As Holmer sees it, religious literature, containing putative historical accounts of events, states certain possibilities for life and encourages their pursuit. They all agree that the language of religion, insofar as it has meaning or real function for men, does not involve any reference to God that cannot, even by the Christian himself, be fully understood in moral terms. The references to God are to be translated into their moral sense in order to be understood.

But surely the moral thesis does not do justice to the form of life that is faith. For if the believer accepted either of these or another similar analysis as true, what would be his attitude toward the life whose form is that of communion with God? He would have to enter into the life of prayer, or submission to and listening for the will of God, with the belief that "God" is a moral idea or at most a fictitious character in an inspiring moral story—much as we
may view, say, Prometheus, Apollo, or Athena in Aeschylean drama (indeed, Braithwaite illustrates with Pilgrim’s Progress as an example of morally inspiring fiction). But if one so thinks of God, how is one to enter into that form of life which is characteristic of theism? Such an account would work only if religious beliefs were simply a certain way of interpreting the world. But it is not. It is a way of living distinguished by its personal and communicative form. Will one praise, give thanks to, make confession to what he believes is a fiction? The reply of the moral analysis is that the ritual form of prayer need not be understood by those who practice it as real personal communication or interchange with some reality whose nature is such as to make such prayer the suitable mode of relationship. Instead it is an as if communication that gives us psychological help, that reminds us of our weakness and of our ideals, and that gives us an exercise to follow in trying to strengthen our moral lives. But this will not do as a defense of the religious practice described above. It does not take personal communion as the essential form of faith. What it calls the theistic life does not have the form of communication with God; it has the form of good behavior. Thus the form of prayer can in principle be removed or surpassed. The moral principles might be expressed in some other form and supported by some other means. And, perhaps most significantly, the ideal of faith would surely be to strengthen one’s character so that religious stories and ritual posturing were no longer needed. The best theist would be the one who needed least to worship. Is it not plain, then, that the moral interpretation would, if it were believed, be not so much a defense of theism as a proposal so to modify it as to change its form?

There is a stronger form of religious reductionism that differs from the moral version by taking the religious stories and ritual form not as psychological and instructional aids, but as truly constituting and belonging to what theistic faith really is. Language about God and addressed to God is no mere support for good behavior that might be achieved without it, or a ladder that might be kicked down once one has climbed up to moral strength. Here, then, is a stronger defense of theism, for it takes the practice of faith not as a confused or unwitting way of doing something other than what it seems to itself to do, but as a form of life that has its own function in the performance of which language about God is the necessary means. There are several proponents of this stronger version of religious positivism, including Paul Holmer (in later articles than the one cited above), Paul van Buren (but not in his earlier book, The Secular Meaning of the Gospel, which was more nearly an expression of the moral version), Peter Winch, D.Z. Phillips and Gordon Kaufman.

The analyses they develop divide into two further subforms, one of which, again, makes a stronger claim on behalf
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of theism than the other. The first view is that faith necessarily involves the language of God, used in ritual contexts, but that 'God' does not mean for the believer, a perfect and personal reality. Since this is the analysis (or propaedeutic to an analysis) elaborated by Paul van Buren in The Edges of Language, we shall call it the van Buren view.

The second form agrees with van Buren's form that Christian faith necessarily involves God-talk, but it goes further by claiming that 'God' as a term or concept does name such a perfect personal reality; only God is not to be taken as real in the sense of existing in himself and outside the form of life for which he is real. Phillips and Kaufman are both proponents of this the strongest form of theistic reductionism—so we shall refer to it as the Phillips-Kaufman view. Which view Holmer holds is not altogether clear, but he seems to fall toward the Phillips-Kaufman position.

We take the van Buren form of reductionism first. We shall see that it is really an intermediate form between the simple, moral version and the stronger claim of Phillips and Kaufman. Van Buren's thesis is that the language of religion, including its talk about God, is essential to theism but that it cannot be correctly understood as naming an individual or personal reality—even if the reality is recognized as "exceedingly exceptional." (The Edges of Language, p. 136). He calls the idea that 'God' names such a transcendent reality 'theism'; but Judaism and Christianity, he insists, are not really theistic. Theism is an historical development parasitic upon Christianity but transforming it into "naive doctrinal literalism," because of the influence of Greek metaphysics. All who think that 'God', in however sui generis a way, names a reality who is actually addressed in prayer, are theists and doctrinal literalists. So van Buren assimilates to the most naive kind of literalism all those who understand 'God' to refer to a reality with whom we personally interact (an assimilation that seems as naive in its appreciation of the history of theology as the naive literalist's appreciation of the complexity of language). On the other hand, the sophisticated, educated Christians of today recognize that in actual use the term 'God' does not function to name an individual but in some way to say more than could be said about our human situation if we used only the clear, precisely fixed, unambiguous language of the "central plains." The Christian (or theist), says van Buren, in using the word 'God' wants to say the most that could possibly be said about fatherhood drawing upon the rich use of that word developed during Israel's history. He wants to speak of a loving father, employing every image he can form of a father perfect in all things. He wants to push on and say that we men are together as brothers might be imagined to be, had they one perfect father. But when he has said all that, he remains dissatisfied with his words, as though the
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last word on this matter had not yet been said. In order to grasp that final limit, therefore, the Christian sometimes cries, "Father!" (a balancing act on the outer edge of language initiated by Jesus of Nazareth).14

Our question for the van Buren analysis is "Can the Christian accept the analysis and continue, consistently with that analysis, to participate in his religion; or must he so modify his mode of religious action as to make it no longer recognizable as the Christian theism which is presumably being defended?" Van Buren certainly intends his analysis as an analysis of the common general form of Christian life, and he claims to attend to the actual use of the term 'God' in the "language, images, literature, and the cultic and other activities of the churches . . ." (p. 2). But in taking up the uses of 'God' in the "classic creeds" (see pp. 138 ff), he ignores the liturgical context within which the creeds themselves are used. He makes nothing of the fact that their mode of reference to God is, in its most basic and inclusive form, personal, that God is addressed and listened to, not simply uttered as a word when our language won't say enough. But van Buren does not really describe. He proposes a theory about what the educated theists of today can presumably make of God language in view of the other language-games in which they participate. The result is an understanding of what the theistic language-game (understood as a complete form or mode of life) really is that is inconsistent with the prayer form through which the faith is lived. If 'God' does not name a reality in relation to whom the proper behavior is devotion through prayer—and according to van Buren it does not—then the form of participation in Christianity misleads the practitioner into regarding his religion as something it is not. For one must, while involved in the liturgy, use the word 'God' as a word of personal communication—not to indicate a limit of language but in praising, thanking, confessing, making supplications, and so on. It follows that if one believes van Buren's analysis and carried it with him into practice, one should change the form of practice to keep it from misleading the religious practitioner into the 'doctrinal literalism' van Buren so despises. Theistic life should give up the interpersonal form of prayer. Van Buren's proposal for understanding God language may be well-groomed, but it does not constitute a defense of theistic practice.

What might a van Buren type of religious reductionist reply? Perhaps that the prayer form itself is a way of going to the edges of language, a way of saying that the situation in which we humans find ourselves is incurably mysterious and ambiguous and so we must use the language of personal communion without taking it as actually involving communion. For we have come up against the edges of language, and so we not only say 'God', but we address ourselves to God as if to one who gives us life and saves us from our
bondage. But such a reply does not take the personal form of the language seriously enough. There are other ways of extending language beyond the unambiguous "central plains" uses than the personal way; yet for Judaism and Christianity, at least, the personal way, the address to God, is scarcely regarded as just one among other possible ways of trying to understand and relate to the mystery of our human condition. It is, as we have said, the form through which the faithful life exists. If its apparent reference to a reality with whom there is personal communion is to be understood in some other way, then again it would seem better to change the form of worship and the context of using the sacred stories than to be misled into thinking that theistic life necessarily means prayer. And then the position would not be a defense of theism but a proposal for a fundamentally different form of religious life.

Yet the intermediate position of van Buren has helped to point the way for any theistic reductionism to take if it is to be more successful in showing that we can consistently lead the life of prayer without believing that God exists in himself. Van Buren has said that religions make a special use of language, and that Jews and Christians (and we can add Muslims) in saying 'God' have tried to say "more" than can be said in the language of special disciplines whose procedure is to fix the meaning of terms clearly and precisely--and therefore to restrict their uses narrowly. If we keep in mind that the theistic life is a life of prayer and that God is therefore conceived therein as the reality in relation to which prayer is the only suitable behavior, then van Buren's idea of the "more" that Christians try to say can be given some direction and content. The name 'God' says "more" by being spoken in the personal, devotional mode. It says that the reality by reference to which the believer lives is at least such as to require submission, praise, thanksgiving, and confession. The concept of God involved in the life of faith is the concept of a reality that is so much "more" than we are that nothing can be more than it. Consequently, the concept of God is the concept of a reality that requires of us an attitude and behavior of worship. Such a reality cannot be less in its actuality than the highest in ours. It must at least have the highest powers that we have, the powers of doing, knowing, and loving. Only such a reality could suitably require from us the highest mode of action of which we are capable; personal devotion and commitment. The God of faith is conceived as at least personal. Not that God is referred to as a person in the same sense as ourselves, but that the reality of God includes and surpasses our powers. That being so, the best we, being persons, can do is to take up the most sincere attitude of personal relation. In that attitude one subject regards another as having its own life and allows it to be itself. Thus we see that the practice of theistic faith through prayerful devotion involves a concept of God as a supra-personal reality in whom our own highest powers of
understanding, loving and acting are perfected. Theists have usually formulated the concept by saying that God is the infinite and eternal redeemer and creator. They have thus taken 'God' to be a referring and a naming word, albeit in the special sense required by so great a reality. Such a conception of God is contained in the use of prayer and devotion to which the term is put. It is no wonder that the moral and intermediate versions of theistic reductionism fail as defenses of theism. They deny the concept of God by the use of which the life of faith is lived. That is why accepting their analyses can only mean modifying the practice of theism.

D.Z. Phillips and Gordon Kaufman, however, propose versions of religious reductionism that recognize the involvement of the personal or supra-personal concept of God in the practical life of faith. They insist upon the concept of God as eternal creator and redeemer or as the perfect transcendent reality best represented in personal terms; and they insist that such a God is 'real.' But they try to show that life according to such a concept does not involve the theoretical judgment or belief that the God so conceived exists in himself independently of the life for which he is real. At first such a maneuver may sound strange--God is the eternal creator and is real but is not believed to exist?--so it is necessary to explain just what is meant in such a collection of claims. Then we shall see at last that the maneuver is not only strange but also unsuccessful.

Phillips carries out his analytic defense of religions using the Wittgensteinian notion of language-games upon which van Buren also drew. Kaufman, on the other hand, uses the language of Kant and of pragmatism--though he is very much influenced by the Wittgensteinian interest in the use of religious language, the phenomenological concern for analyzing the structure of life form, and the Tillichian idea of God as symbol. But despite their differences, on the questions that are our concern here their views are essentially the same.

It is in terms of the idea of 'forms of life' that both thinkers develop their philosophies of religion. Both recognize different 'forms of life' or 'language-games' or, invoking the language of phenomenology, 'regions of consciousness.' For example, there are religious, political and economic life-forms; life-forms of natural science and technology and so on. Each one is a system of language or concepts (in phenomenological terms we should say that each life-form is a system of intentional objects and structures) pursuant to certain values or goals which are expressed in the language or figured among the intentional objects. Everything that is of concern for the life-form is present by means of language, concepts, or intentional structures; and there are certain fundamental organizing concepts or intentional objects that are necessary to make that form of life.
what it is. They determine what for that form of life is real.

According to Phillips and Kaufman, then, religions are particular forms of life with their own conceptual or intentional structures, so that if one would understand theism one must analyze its language-games or its fundamental concepts and their use. Doing so, both thinkers find that theism is a practical form of life more than a reflective, theoretical one. Not that it does not have its reflective side, its mode of understanding and its criteria of truth and falsity; but that the true explanation or understanding of objects is not its primary end as is the case for, say, physics, anthropology, economics, etc. Rather, as Kaufman puts it, faith in God is a practical stance toward life and the world, the aim of which is the maximizing of possible value for life. And Phillips, too, regards acts of devotion as functioning to orient us toward certain values. 

But what distinguishes this last version of theistic reductionism from the weaker forms discussed earlier is not the idea of forms of life but the claim that the theistic form of life is structured by the fundamental concept of God as that reality which involves its users in a personal mode of behavior in which God is addressed in prayer. Kaufman expresses the view of both when he says that the knowledge of God is given "in the form of certain basic presuppositions (faith) about life and the world, with which experience is approached, apprehended, and interpreted." (p. 254). It is because the concept of God is so absolute a presupposition for belief that there can be no evidence, no experience, which could count against the belief in God. Phillips makes the point over and over again: no matter what transpires in the believer's life, if his faith is not merely superstition, he will know what happens as the answer to his prayer, for it is the belief in God that determines how whatever happens is to be taken ("Language Games and Theology"). Hence, for the believer God is the most real of realities: "the most objective or real element of the believer's phenomenological world," says Kaufman. (p. 92).

In view of the insistence of both Kaufman and Phillips that God's reality is affirmed rather than denied by their analysis of Christian faith, what makes their accounts reductionist? It is that each finally understands the reality of God wholly in terms of the practical function the language of God has within the life of faith. God is real for the believer because the believer refers all his concerns to God in thanksgiving, confession, and supplication; for him God is the reality that is there before everything else. But, on the other hand, there is no intelligible question about whether God does or does not exist in himself independently of the form of life in which he is acknowledged, no question about whether belief in God is true (unless by 'true' one means 'sincere'). Faith in God is not believing
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that God exists or that one's faith includes a true understanding of reality; it is devotion to God, a way of acting that uses a certain language. The point can also be expressed in quasi-phenomenological terms. God is the most fundamental intentional object by reference to which theistic life is lived, but the life is perfectly intelligible without adding to it the assertion that outside the practical, devotional mode of 'intending' God, God really exists as some being in himself carrying on life independently of ourselves and the world.

We must be careful not to identify reductionism with non-reductionism. It is not the same thing to say that religious beliefs cannot be justified by reference to realities outside of religious life or by philosophical arguments and proofs (non-foundationalism) as to say that theistic language does not refer to a God who exists in himself independently of the life of faith (linguistic or conceptual reductionism). There certainly are many theologians who qualify as non-foundationalists but who unambiguously affirm the independent existence of God and the referential character of language about God. Karl Barth and Emil Brunner are important recent examples, and there are many current philosophers of religion who also qualify, e.g., Donald Hudson (A Philosophical Approach to Religion (London, 1974)), Diogenes Allen ("Motives, Rationales, and Religious Beliefs," American Philosophical Quarterly, Volume 3, no. 2 (April, 1966), 111-127), and John Whittaker (Matters of Faith and Matters of Principle: Religious Truth Claims and Their Logic (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1981)). Kaufman and Phillips, on the other hand, are certainly non-foundationalists, but I am arguing that their accounts of the reality of God make them reductionists as well.

Kaufman might well object to a reductionist interpretation of his essays in God the Problem. His discussions are neither entirely consistent with each other (they were not written to be) nor entirely clear. There is much that he says about God as personal agent that is not in itself reductionist, e.g., the account of divine action developed in "On the Meaning of "Act of God."" (119-147). But I believe that my interpretation applies precisely to Kaufman's efforts to discuss the kind of reality which God has. It is in those discussions that Kaufman reduces God to the status of a concept and its efficacy in organizing life. It is not necessarily reductionism to say that the concept of God plays a practical role in life; no philosophical theologian would deny that. But it is reductionism to insist that the meaning of God's reality is wholly given in terms of the practical function belief in God has for human life, for that means that God's reality has nothing to do with the life or being of God in himself.

It could be objected that Kaufman's distinction between the 'real' referent of 'God' and the 'available' referent of
God does consider a sense in which the meaning of God's reality involves the recognition that God exists in himself and independently of the human lives that are organized by the practical use of the concept. Certainly the distinction makes it possible to hold such a realist as opposed to reductionist view. Yet Kaufman does not consistently make a non-reductionist use of the distinction. Let me explain.

The real referent is God as he is in himself, the utterly transcendent; the available referent is God as he is conceived and presented by man in the history and literature of religion. The point of the distinction would appear to be that belief in God involves believing that God as he is in himself exists independently of our thought and language about him but that our thought and language can never be adequate to understanding his nature. Thus, the real referent would be the existing God whose existence is presupposed whenever we practice faith, and the available referent would be our symbol or complex image or concept about the God who is believed independently to exist. To the extent that the above is what Kaufman means, he is not a religious reductionist. However, having made the distinction (see God the Problem, pp. 82-86), Kaufman goes on to argue not that our images of God refer to a God whose independent existence is presupposed and whose nature is only inadequately grasped in the images, but rather that the images themselves refer to the available referent.

In this sense "God" denotes for all practical purposes what is essentially a mental or imaginative construct. This does not mean, of course, that believers directly pray to or seek to serve some mere idea or imagine in their minds...; it is rather that what their images and ideas are of is the available God, not some utterly unknowable X.

This fact, that the God actually available to people is an imaginative construct, does not necessarily mean that God is "unreal" or "merely imaginary" or something of that sort. (p. 86)

Now it would seem that right here is the perfect place for Kaufman to make the non-reductionist point and to make good use of his distinction if he intended to. He might have said that to say that the available God is an imaginative construct does not mean that God is merely imaginary; for in thinking in terms of the imaginative construct, we presuppose that it is of a God who exists apart from the construct, that it is of the real referent. Instead, Kaufman goes on to argue that the reality of God is to be construed in terms of the practical efficacy the idea of God has in organizing life. It is not held that belief in the independent existence of God practically functions to organize life (that would be a non-reductionist use of the real-available referent distinction), but that the reality of God...
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is the reality he has for the life of faith, i.e., the efficacy of the idea of God in the life of faith.

Thus, even if Kaufman hesitates over the reductionist move, the account he actually gives seems finally to identify the reality of God with the idea of God and its efficacy. I see nothing in his later books, Essay on Theological Method (Scholars Press, 1975; rev. ed. 1979) and The Theological Imagination (Westminster Press, 1981) that takes back the reductionist view of God the Problem.

What then of Phillips? Since he explicitly criticizes various forms of reductionism and denies being a reductionist himself, it will be necessary to point out in detail how his account of God's reality turns out after all to be reductionist.

First, however, we should note the senses in which he claims not to be a reductionist. He devotes the better part of Religion without Explanation to explanations of religion given by social scientists. Social science explanations are reductionist, he says, in that they explain how it is that religious believers are not doing what they themselves think they are doing in practicing faith but are doing something else instead. When believers recognize the real basis of religious belief and practice, they can no longer continue to believe; for they see that their beliefs are not what they took them to be. Such social science reductionism is openly anti-religion. (Note the similarity of Phillips' criticism of social science reductionism to the criticism of reductionisms we have been developing in this paper.) But Phillips recognizes that some pro-religion explanations are reductionist also. He criticizes Braithwaite, for example, (RWE, pp. 140, 145). And, especially, he criticizes as reductionist all efforts to justify belief in God by appeal to philosophical arguments or proofs, thereby bringing the whole tradition of natural or rational theology under his critique. Rational theology, he thinks, is reductionist—though unconsciously and unintentionally—because in attempts to demonstrate the existence of God it regards God as an object. And that is "the naturalistic fallacy in religion" (CP, pp. 105-111; p. 106, etc.), the fallacy of reducing the reality of God to the kind of reality that belongs to natural objects.

Phillips' positive accounts of religious life consist in explaining how various uses of religious language—in prayers, rituals, religious reflections on life, etc.—have their intelligible meaning precisely in functions that do not require the use of 'God' in an "unconsciously reductionist" or naturalistic sense, that is, that do not require the user to think that 'God' refers to the kind of realities recognized in non-religious language games or regions of life.
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But if Phillips is not a reductionist as he defines the term, he is certainly a reductionist as the term was defined at the outset of this paper. I can see no other interpretation of his views than to say that he understands the reality of God to consist wholly in the practical value theistic language has in structuring the lives that use it, giving them their peculiar values, outlooks, attitudes, and characters. Yet, Phillips' discussions are so subtle it will be necessary to clarify his ideas in some detail. When that has been done we will finally be able to return to the main line of the argument. We will have clarified both Kaufman's and Phillips' understanding of the reality of God and will be able to show that it does not do justice to the actual use of theistic language by practitioners of faith and that it would, if adopted by them, logically lead to a diminished ability to continue in the life of faith.

Begin with The Concept of Prayer. Phillips takes prayer, as I have also proposed we should, as fundamental to religious life. We would not expect such an approach to be reductionist; it gives too much importance to the relation of the one who prays to God. And that seems far from the notion that the reality of God consists in the practical shape the belief in God gives to one's life. Phillips himself goes so far, in fact, as to say that "no matter how he explains it, it is essential for the believer to assert that he talks to someone other than himself when he prays. A conviction that one is talking to oneself is the death of prayer."

Despite that assertion, we shall see later that Phillips himself finally explains the reality of God for the life of prayer in a way that amounts to saying that in praying one is talking to oneself.

In his examination, Phillips develops the view that all forms of prayer—prayers of adoration, confession, thanksgiving, petition—are at bottom ways of recognizing and expressing one's dependence upon God. One might even say that prayer, for Phillips, is simply a way of living life as dependent upon God. What Phillips means by 'dependence upon God' is crucial. He explains in his discussions of the various modes of prayer, that genuine dependence upon God is not depending upon God to make things a particular way. It is rather a matter of a peculiar way (viz. the faithful way) of accepting whatever happens or doesn't happen. It is recognizing that one is not in control, but that life retains its value no matter what happens. One can, of course, accept whatever happens in a purely secular way, not by using a language of dependence upon God but by telling oneself things like, 'don't worry; you just have to take things as they come.' But that way of accepting things does not come to the same thing as accepting things through praying to God or depending upon God. That one lives one's acceptance through prayer, makes one's life a peculiar kind of life,
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makes it a dependence upon God.

Though the claim that living through prayer is living as dependent upon God is in itself anything but a reductionist claim, Phillips' explanations of what dependence on God is are reductionist. He says a number of things about the ways dependence on God is involved in the different modes of prayer, but what is important about them for our purposes is that they all involve explaining the reality of the God addressed in prayer as the same thing as the state of being that the life of prayer produces in the one who prays. It is not that the reality of God is able to bring about a certain state of being in his worshipers, but that what the reality of God means is that the one who prays has a certain state of being. Thus, Phillips says that it is always superstition rather than prayer to believe that God could respond to prayer by making things go differently than they would if one did not pray. To think of God as a being who has a life of his own and is able to act in different ways, is always to commit the 'naturalistic fallacy in religion.' To speak of God that way is to make a logical mistake, is to think with a naturalistic concept of God that is contrary to the deepest insights of faith. (See CP, especially Chapters 4, 5, and 6). Since Phillips is quite explicit in making these claims, he is a reductionist of the kind I have described.

In Death and Immortality, Phillips says that what believers can intelligibly mean by eternal life is "participation in the life of God, and that this life has to do with... seeing that all things are a gift from God..." (DI, p. 55). He seems, then, to be speaking in the usual way of God as one who has a life of his own in which people may or may not participate and as one who may act to give things to people. But, anticipating the objection that he has not proved the existence of God, he asserts that the reality of God is not something to be proved. Rather, "In learning by contemplation, attention, renunciation, what forgiving, thanking, loving, etc. mean in these contexts, the believer is participating in the reality of God..." (p. 55). So far his words here assert a non-foundationalist position but do not necessarily entail linguistic reductionism. One can surely hold both that one knows God by entering into a life whose form is one of interacting with him (in contemplation, attention, renunciation, thanking, praising, confessing, etc.), and also hold that God has a reality independent of the lives who believe in him. Phillips goes on, however, to say of the actions of contemplating, attending, renouncing, etc. that "this is what we mean by God's reality." (DI, p. 55, Phillips' emphasis). With these words Phillips passes from non-foundationalism to reductionism. What we mean by the "reality" of God, he is saying, is the life that the believer has just insofar as he lives life as a contemplating, attending, and renouncing and carries out those activities by means of the language and images of
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The next paragraph further clarifies Phillips' view. He says, "The reality [of God] is independent of any given believer, but its independence is not the independence of a separate biography. It is independent of the believer in that the believer measures his life against it. (DI, p. 55). Surely Phillips is unambiguous about his reductionism here. God is not a being with a life of his own independently of the life of faith that uses the language of God; God has no biography. Instead, the independence or trans-individual character of God's reality is exactly the kind of independent reality that concepts have, that of a standard or ideal by which human experience can be ordered and evaluated.

Consider one more example. In "Religious Beliefs and Language Games," Phillips says, "the difference between a man who does and a man who does not believe in God is like the difference between a man who does and a man who does not believe in a picture" (p. 89). And, he says, believing in a picture is not like believing an hypothesis whose verification depends upon what happens under prescribed conditions; believing in a picture means regulating one's life by it. Indeed, Phillips puts it even more strongly than that: "Believing in the picture means, for example, putting one's trust in it, sacrificing for it, letting it regulate one's life, and so on" [my emphasis] (p. 90). It is startling here that Phillips says one trusts and sacrifices for the picture, not that by using the picture one trusts in and sacrifices "for God." God is a picture? Furthermore, Phillips claims that beliefs in religious pictures are "absolutes for believers in so far as they predominate in and determine much of their thinking. The absolute beliefs are the criteria, not the object of assessment" (p. 90). Thus, belief in God, his eternity, love, mercy, power, etc. is not itself belief in something that is in itself and that is an object of belief; it is using a 'picture' to assess our various experiences. Phillips seems quite unambiguously, then, to claim that the language about God does not refer to any reality, even to a unique reality, except indirectly to a conceptual or linguistic one. The reality of God is the 'reality' God has within the life which speaks of and to him, nothing more.

Finally, here is one last passage which clearly asserts the kind of reductionism we have been discussing. It comes from Religion without Explanation.

Some people speak of natural gifts and not be led to worship. For others, this sense of the given leads to prayer and worship. In face of what is given, the believer kneels. Talk of 'God' has its sense in this reaction. It is not the name of an individual; it does not refer to anything [my em-
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phasis] (REW, pp. 147-148).

It is the claim that talk of God (and talking to God in prayer) does not refer to anything or anyone that makes Phillips a theistic reductionist, since that view forces one always to reduce the reality of God to characteristics internal to the individual or collective life of faith.

Phillips realizes that the account he gives of divine reality will provoke charges of reductionism and atheism against him.

Many philosophers would react to these conclusions [that theistic language does not] by saying that if religious perspectives do not refer to anything, they are simply a disguised form of atheism (RWE, p. 149).

To disarm the charges, he simply asserts that any demand that religious language refer to an individual is guilty of importing into religious beliefs a notion of reference that is quite alien to them (RWE, p. 148). He holds, as we noted before, that to take religious language as referential is the real reductionism, since it necessarily means reducing God to a natural object.

Now that way of disarming the charge assumes that all reference is naturalistic reference, and so blanket a charge seems inconsistent with Phillips' own view of language. Why should all referring be naturalistic? Why can there not be referring appropriate to the unique kind of reality believers take God to be, a referring which posits God's active, individual, and independent reality without taking these terms univocally, without taking God as a natural object located among other natural objects in space and time? There is a long history of views on the uniqueness of God and on the peculiar conceptual and logical character of thought about and reference to God. It may be that God has been conceived naturalistically and that believers sometimes, even often, try to relate themselves to God as a natural object. Nonetheless, abusus non tollit usus. The sometime failures of theologians and believers to grasp the uniqueness of God and so of reference to God does not imply that the proper use of theistic language cannot and does not refer to God. So Phillips' effort to disarm the charge of reductionism by turning it toward those who regard God as a reality existing in himself independently of the life of faith begs the question.

Supposing, now, that their reductionism has been sufficiently established, let us return to the views of Kaufman and Phillips, to see whether they work as a defense of theistic life. For even if their views are reductionist in the way I have argued, that in itself does not mean they are wrong.
The theistic reductionism of Kaufman and Phillips boils down to this: Faith in God exists only through the idea of our language addressed to that reality which exceeds all others in power, goodness and love. Yet the ontological status of that reality is not that of a power, goodness and loved enacted by an existing individual. Instead, its ontological status is that of an idea which functions to regulate life on the most fundamental and important level. Nonetheless, faith is not faith is an idea ("that is not what they [religious language games] mean!" (Phillips, Faith and Philosophical Enquiry, p. 130.)); faith is directed toward, intends or means God as the most perfect reality. And so long as one remains practically engaged in faith, no question about the status or nature of this reality can arise. When, however, we do turn to theoretical reflection, we discover that the language of faith in which God as perfect reality is meant is a language that does not assert truth about the world but instead practically organizes life. Therefore, the idea of God's independent existence is a mistake. It imposes an "alien grammar on religious discourse," viz. the grammar of distinguishable physical objects. Of course, the old natural or rational theology, insofar as concerned with the grounds for believing that God exists, was one grand category-mistake, making a whole discipline out of applying to religious life categories appropriate either to science or to our everyday practical business with physical things. Some believers may think that their belief is a belief that God exists, but that is a confusion of their actual devotion to God with a reflection about their devotion.

The religious reductionism we have been describing is a current incarnation of post-Kantian scepticism. We cannot know things as they are in themselves; we know only appearances. And appearances appear to us by means of certain concepts, language forms, or intentional structures. Thus, we can meaningfully ask questions only about the concepts and the appearances they organize. There is no question about whether there is anything outside the appearances. It is in principle impossible to speak of such. The very words we use, 'exists', 'real', etc. have their meaning only within a form of life. The idea that something might exist independently of some consciousness or language-game for which it is makes no sense. So it is for God. God is not an object among objects in the world; therefore he must be a concept.

Here, then, is the strongest form of theistic reductionism. It relieves the believer of any need for stating grounds for believing that God exists or that the idea of God is true as an account of the way reality ultimately really is. Yet it claims also to leave him with the concept of God as eternal creator and redeemer such that the proper use of the concept or name is in prayer, the referring of
all to God.

But does it work? I do not think so. For the logic of the use of concepts in the form of 'communion with' involves reference to the one with whom the relation is established as to one who is capable of responding to overtures with actions of its own originated from itself. That is, it involves the assumption of the reality of the addressee as an 'in itself' reality; the language form can only function where it takes the addressee not as an appearance or as a concept but as that which exists in itself, whatever may be the limitations of our knowledge of it. If, for example, I try to talk with another person, I recognize him as like myself, able to act as I am able to act, able to come to meet me with action of his own and thus as existing in himself and quite apart from my life in which I address him. If, on the other hand, I believed that he did not so exist apart from my life, I should have no reason to relate to him in the personal mode, i.e., to respect him as one able to act in all the ways that I can act and capable of actions that come to meet me. And again, suppose that solipsism is true. Then I am the only personal reality there is. Still, I may in delusion live in a personal mode that attributes self-being or independent existence to certain regular parts of my dream. So long as I act personally toward them or live in a form of communion with them, however, I believe that they exist apart from me, and in addressing them I also thereby refer to them. But as soon as I adopt the theory about these presumed others that they are real only insofar as I treat them as real, only insofar as the assumption of their personal reality shapes my action, my experience of them and my action toward them must change. I can no longer live a direct life of communion with them, but, to the extent that the personal mode is retained at all, I will live an 'as it were' communion with them. And if I am to live consistently with my understanding, I must give up that deluded life of inappropriately acting in the mode of 'communion with.'

The point I am making depends upon distinguishing speaking about objects from speaking to or with persons. One may speak about objects and even fictional persons without necessarily presupposing their independent existence, i.e., their ability to sustain themselves, to resist destruction by other things and affect others through a power of their own that is not wholly reducible to the powers possessed by other things. So one may speak of Odysseus, for example, discussing his character and his action seriously and at great length without once supposing that Odysseus ever existed except in the imaginations of Homer and the millions of Homer's hearers and readers. Or one may speak of illusion without ever supposing them to have a power of sustaining themselves and acting from within themselves—they exist only in the minds of those for whom they are illusions. We do, of course, take many things of which we
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speak as things which exist independently of our own talk about them. We take them not as parts of a language game or as ideas but as entities sustaining themselves. But so long as we only speak about objects, even personal objects, we are free to take them as existing only as objects for or within the language. We are free to understand their reality as the practical efficacy of so speaking (when we are concerned to do something about them other than speak, however, this may no longer be true). That is why Phillips and Kaufman can suggest that God's reality consists in the practical function of the idea of God in the life of the believer.

When, however, we consider that language is not only about objects but addressed to persons in explicit communication with them the case is otherwise. It has been persuasively argued that all language presupposes the independent existence or possible independent existence of someone to whom it is addressed, i.e., that all language tacitly addresses itself to someone. Be that as it may it is clearly the case that when the explicit form of personal address is used, a belief in the independent existence and self-determination of the person to whom it is addressed is presupposed. One asks a question, makes a request, gives a compliment, makes a promise and so on. These are actions that make sense only in relation to that whose reality is such that it is able to understand and respond in an action that is shaped by receiving the request, promise, question, etc. That is, to explicitly direct one's statements to another is to take that other as able to act in its own right, to determine (at least in part) its own mode of existence through its own interpretation of what it encounters. Such an ability to act is to exist independently, to be something in itself (not, however, necessarily wholly in itself in the sense that it is in no way reciprocally affected by others). The language of personal address presupposes more than a certain grammar (or concepts) and appearances; it presupposes the active power and independent existence of the other to whom it is addressed.

Now let us consider the case of God. In faith as we earlier described it, the believer attempts to live his life in the mode of communion with the eternal creator and redeemer. Thus the concept of God is, as the religious positivist says, used in organizing life. But it can organize life as prayer if and only if it is believed to refer beyond the life it organizes to a reality that exists in itself. And not only that exists in itself. For that communion which consists in praise, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication is directed toward what the believer takes to be the most exalted reality, the highest degree of self-originating being, the being who most exists in himself. If God were not thus conceived as existing apart from the life of faith, then the concept could not have its reasonable use as one through which a life of 'communion with' is enjoined.
The use of the concept is its use in making life a relating to that which is believed most wholly to exist in itself such that the life of prayer is the appropriate response. But suppose that the believer comes to think himself mistaken; suppose that he takes up the theory about his faith that it does not truly refer to a reality beyond the life of faith itself and that 'God' is only an effective presupposition necessary for living the form of life that is faith. Then the believer's experience and action within his life of faith will change. He will no longer live his life as a communion with but as a pretending at communion with God.

The religious reductionist might try to take the sting from this conclusion by noting that we do use the language of personal communion in relation to realities that we do not take as existing in themselves. I shall refer to my own experience to make and then criticize the reductionist's point. When I was four I "talked with" my imaginary playmate and had my older siblings humor me by also "talking with" him. It was a game. Kyle Kent did not say anything but what I made him say; he was not real except in and for my game. Perhaps (I don't remember) I believed that he was really there on his own and able to act from his own power. If I did presuppose his "in-himselfness," then when I talked with him I did not take myself to be pretending to talk with him but rather took myself to be playing a real game through real communication with a real Kyle Kent. So, the religious reductionist says, the naive believer may take himself to be living through real communication with a real most perfectly self-determining being. But when I came to think of Kyle Kent as my imaginary playmate, I did not stop "playing with" him. I continued the game, only now it was a conscious playing at personal interaction by means of the idea of an imaginary Kyle Kent. Why may not it go the same way for religious believers when they get over their naivete? They will continue to use the language of personal communion with the most perfect creating and redeeming being. Indeed, that will be the only way they can practice faith. But they need not suppose that the God whom they address exists except as the concept or in the grammar necessary to playing that game. In other words, recognizing that God is imaginary need not alter the essential form of the faith anymore than recognizing that Kyle Kent was imaginary stopped me from playing with him. Faith would still be prayer to God the creator and redeemer and would still, inasmuch as its benefits were great, be a highly important "game" to play.

Nevertheless, I believe that it would necessarily be destructive of faith were one to take its language in such a way. It is a credit to our sanity that we give up our imaginary playmates. If we did not, we would to that extent have failed to understand the world. For imaginary playmates figure into life in a significantly different way than real ones. When I played with Kyle Kent, I had to make up
his role as well as my own. But my real playmates were quite capable of doing it for themselves. They impressed upon me certain restrictions that Kyle did not. If I was to play I had to put attention to them and give them their say. I had to put myself in a certain position of receptivity to them. There were times when Kyle came in handy—when others weren't around or when they wouldn't let me have my way. As I matured, however, I was able to do without him. It remains true, of course, that if I wanted to retreat into imaginary communication, I had to do it by means of the language of personal communion, I had to address an imaginary Kyle Kent. But I was under no responsibility to go on playing with him. Kyle was not there either in need of my friendship or demanding that I acknowledge him. So I gave him up. Comparing him with my real friends, I found him unable to sustain the personal communion form of life. Such, I believe, would be the same effect of the believer's regarding God not as existing in himself but as the imaginary creator and redeemer with whom we engage in imaginary communion. The religious game could still not be played without the prayerful address to and waiting upon God, it is true. but the believer would have to play God's role for him. And why should he? He would not believe that God was there to demand it of him in the way that our real friends demand it of us. Yet it is part of the language of faith to take God not as waiting upon the believer to give him life but as demanding that the believer acknowledge him and worship. The game is not taken as one that may be played but as one that must be played. That being so, the believer's idea of God is more like our idea of real friends than of imaginary friends. And if the imaginary person's way of thinking about God were taken up, the believer would have difficulty taking seriously the ideas that worship is (a) demanded of us and (b) receptivity to the divine will rather than a making up of the divine role. 'God' would cease to sustain the life of prayer. If faith essentially is a prayerful relation to God, faith must take God as existing in himself.

The acceptance of theistic reductionism would quite naturally lead to the transformation of the life of prayer into a type of literary humanism. Therein God would be taken as an organizing concept, the meaning of which is understood through the analysis of the historical stories and literature recognized in the theistic traditions. The proper mode of behavior in relation to the concept of God would not be that of prayer but that of the humanist toward the great literary images: Odysseus, Gilgamesh, Roland, Prometheus, Pilgrim, Beatrice, Frodo. Such heroes are presented in personal form, and they are quite 'real' for one who takes them seriously by rehearsing their stories and looking for the light they shed on the human life struggle. If one should take up such a figure, say Odysseus, as an organizing figure for practical life, then (in the view of religious reductionism) that figure would be as real for his "believ-
er" as God is for the theist. Nor would any belief that
Odysseus exists in himself apart from the literature which
presents the image and the life which molds itself by it, be
necessary. But, then, one who so adopts such a hero would
be going too far if he began to pray to him, to act as if he
were in some communion with him. That is simply not neces-
sary if one takes the hero to be a literary image providing
a model for living. Neither would it be necessary if one
took God as such a concept or figure. Then we might just as
well eliminate the form of prayer and admit that it is no
longer to be taken as the essence of theistic life. And is
this not what many, accepting reductionism, do? But this
means that if theistic reductionists continue to enter into
ritual life, they must hold a view of it like either the
moral or the intermediate version of the thesis. The lan-
guage of address to God must be seen perhaps at best as a
psychological support or as a way of helping a group to en-
tertain the same organizing ideal.

Our religious reductionists might reply, however, that
the criticism of their position as a defense of theistic
life confuses philosophical understanding with religious
understanding. Philosophical understanding gives a theory
about theism's use of the name or concept of God, while
religious understanding is the understanding of God, i.e.,
the actual life of prayer using the concept of God. What
makes us confuse these modes of understanding is the mistak-
en idea that concepts are mental entities that refer to some
'object,' so that the object of the concept of 'God' can be
made an object for further clarification by philosophical
inquiry. But, the reply goes on, in truth the religious
understanding of God needs no clarification from philosophy.
To use the language of personal communion with God is to
understand God; the meaning of the term 'God' is its use
within the language of prayer and devotion. Knowing philo-
sophically that God is the presupposition of a personal lan-
guage form does not change the meaning of the concept; it is
still the concept of that reality which involves the action
of prayerful devotion. It is only because that is the con-
tent of the idea that the idea does order life as it does.
Therefore no problem for faith is presented by religious
reductionism. Philosophy and religion are two different
life-forms or language-games; and they serve different func-
tions. If one would practice theism one must take up that
idea of God and participate in the way of life that uses it.
In the life that follows, God will be real in every sense
that matters to faith. No theory about it can change the
actual practice of it—it can only change other theories
about it. If, on the other hand, one would practice philo-
sophy, one must make the theistic life of faith into an ob-
ject to be understood. But it is not God who will be there-
by understood; it is the form of life that presupposes God
as its fundamental reality that will be understood. For God
is no individual existing independently of the life of faith
and therefore available to become an object of the philo-
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sophical life-form.

I think that such a defense is a dodge. It asks us to separate the theory about religion from the practice of religion. Such a separation is impossible. If we hold the theory propounded in theistic reductionism and also proceed to practice faith as prayer, then we must either forget the theory we have adopted or practice faith not as prayer but as pretending at prayer.

Perhaps there is another possibility. Perhaps we can be in doubt about the truth of the belief in God's independent existence and, at the same time, because the condition is one of doubt rather than certainly, choose to participate in the life of faith as a life of communion with God. Now it seems that there are many who fall into this category. Indeed, no less a representative of Christianity than St. Augustine held that faith is not the removal of doubt (in his treatise, The Utility of Believing). But it should be noted that such a choice of communion while remaining uncertain about the existence of God is a choice that involves internal tension and an effort of will. The life of faith must be chosen or willed because one is not sure that it is based upon truth. Furthermore, there are degrees of faith. We may enter more or less feebly into communion with God. The more we tend not only to consider the possibility that God's reality is wholly internal to the life of faith but to choose that possibility as our standpoint, the less we will be able to enter into the life of faith as one of communion with God and more faith will begin to be transformed into another way of life.

I have done nothing here to support the believer's conviction that his faith is truly lived in relation to an existing divine individual. Perhaps faith is after all a delusion. But I have tried to show that we cannot, once reflection upon faith begins, sidestep the question of God's independent existence in the manner attempted by the various forms of theistic reductionism. If we choose to act toward God as toward one with whom there is communion, a meeting of lives each originating from its own center, then we thereby commit ourselves to the belief that God exists. The affirmation of God's existence is contained in the practical life of faith as a life of prayer.
FOOTNOTES

1. The term 'Wittgenstein fideism' has also been used (by Kai Nielsen in "Wittgensteinian Fideism," Philosophy 42, 1967). It should be noted that the present critique is different from that developed by Nielsen.

2. Although most of the philosophers involved do their work against a Christian background, the position applies to theism in general, to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

3. This is not to say that there might not be some who actively participate in a theistic life-form and who also hold the theory that their participation does not involve the belief that God exists, but then such a person's religious life would be at odds with his theoretical life. Were he to integrate his theory with his practice, he would have to change. He would either have to reject the theory or alter the form of his religious life. In real life, of course, we find persons in various states and degrees of integration, doubt, and conviction. One might, for example, practice the life of faith while perplexed for various reasons about how to understand—and consequently to direct—his practice. Such perplexity might be due to questions about the meaning and intelligibility of the idea of God, about whether devotion to God does involve belief that God exists. One can live with a certain amount of inner tension and doubt. But tension and conflict are part of such a situation. To practice the Christian life-form and to think that it does not mean believing that God exists is to be at odds with oneself. To integrate requires a change of either practice or theory.


7. See, for example, "Wittgenstein and Theology" in Reflection, Vol. 65, no. 4 (1968) and "Language Theology: Some Critical Notes" in Harvard Theological Review, LVIII, 3 (July, 1965), 242-61.


12. There is some ambiguity in Phillip's account, however, in that some passages suggest that the personal mode of prayer is not necessary for religious life but is only a special way of cultivating certain attitudes and virtues. It is to the extent that the form of prayer is taken as the necessary form of Christian life that Phillips exemplifies this position.

13. On p. 1 of The Edges of Language van Buren warns us that his understanding of religious language applies only to the religious language of this special group: "The religion that I shall analyze is that of educated Christians in the West in this last third of the twentieth century." However, if educated Christians of today do understand their use of religious language in the way van Buren recommends, then their participation in the services of worship would lead logically to the elimination of the personal or prayer form of worship—but that is the conclusion for which this critique is arguing.

14. Van Buren, p. 139. We can agree that the Christian goes to the edges of language in speaking of God. But saying that does not mean that we are let off the effort to give some idea about what the "more" may be. The way in which the reference to God occurs within Christian life is in a personal mode. Are we to take this as a simple confusion? Why is it that the "more" requires for the Christian this personal form?

15. There is an overlapping among the forms, and distinctions should not be drawn too absolutely. Still, the distinctions are real, and failure to mark them can produce a welter of confusion for philosophy—and within the various regions if concepts belonging to one get imported into the other.

16. See Kaufman, God the Problem, Chapter 5; and Phillips, "Religious Beliefs and Language Games" in Faith and Philosophical Enquiry; and The Concept of Prayer.

17. Kaufman defines faith in and commitment to God as "practical postures of a self striving to represent to itself with the only kind of imagery or symbolism available a world in which moral action and seriousness about life make ultimate sense." (p. 109) Thus, the life of faith is a way of life in which devotion to God is a necessary practical presupposition. The question whether God exists apart from the life in which the faith mode of entertaining the idea of God plays the founding role, is just inappropriate.
18. One referee thought that I was making such an identification. I am indebted to him or her for helping me to clarify this point.

19. Not that there is no relation at all of matters outside religion to religious language games. In "Religious Beliefs and Language Games" Phillips argues that important problems in human life (e.g., the recognition of mortality, the reality of suffering, moral obligation and failure, etc.) may have important bearings on the shape of religious belief and on whether one does or does not believe. But such matters cannot rightly be used to justify religious belief. The "relation between religious beliefs and the non-religious facts" cannot, he insists, be "that between what is justified and its justification, or that between a conclusion and its grounds" (FPE, 101).

20. I am not alone in thinking that Phillips is a theistic reductionist. Patrick Sherry says, "... it often seems as if Phillips is reducing God to a concept or to some aspect of the world ..." (Religion, Truth and Language Games (London, 1977), 53). And Donald Hudson takes Phillips as representative of philosophers who "attempt to reduce the concept of the existence of God to the concept of the existence of something else whose existence is not problematic." (A Philosophical Approach to Religion (London, 1974), 94).


22. Insofar as Kaufman and Phillips are objecting to taking God as a contingent spatio-temporal object, their point is well taken. If 'exists' means 'observably present in space and time as conditioned by other presences', then certainly God does not 'exist'. This point, of course, has a long and respected history in natural theology where great emphasis has been placed upon the difference between God's existence as necessary and the existence of finite objects as contingent. It is an old point, then, that God does not exist precisely as other realities exist. But Phillips and Kaufman have a further point to make than the negative one. It is not just that God is not a physical object but that God's reality is to be construed in terms of the practical function in life of the idea of God as eternal creator and redeemer or most perfect reality (or some such typical religious description.).

23. By Austin Farrer in Faith and Speculation (London, 1967) and in a talk to the "Metaphysicists" given somewhere around 1949 and published as "Signification" in Reflective Faith, ed. Charles C. Conti (London: SPCK, 1972), 149-54; and by Stuart Hampshire in Thought and Action (New York, 1960). A similar point seems contained in Wittgenstein's arguments against private language, only the kind of metaphysical talk about existence that Farrer and Hampshire are willing to engage in is eschewed by him.